



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

**Teacher Education via Open
and Distance Learning at
The Open University
of Sri Lanka:
A Transformational Journey**

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Shironica P. Karunanayaka



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Author: Shironica P. Karunanayaka

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Abstract

This monograph explores the evolution and impact of teacher education programs and practices implemented through the open and distance learning (ODL) mode at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Since its inception in 1980, OUSL has implemented teacher education programs through ODL, which have continuously expanded and extended in many ways. The aim of the current study was to review the development of teacher education provided via ODL at OUSL from 1980 to 2023, with a view to identifying the key trends, changes in pedagogical approaches, impact of technological integrations, good practices, and areas for future development. Through a comprehensive review of literature, which revealed the multi-dimensional nature of providing teacher education through the ODL mode, a conceptual framework grounded in theoretical and empirical literature related to ODL practices in teacher education was developed. It provided a foundation for understanding the complexities and discovering the affordances of implementing teacher education programs in an ODL context.

Employing a documentary research approach, the study critically examined a range of relevant articles published during the period from 1980 to 2023. This was complemented by semi-structured interviews conducted with a group of fourteen participants comprising former and current academic staff members of the Faculty of Education selected through purposive sampling. The investigation resulted in a comprehensive narrative of the transformational journey of propagating teacher education via ODL at OUSL over four decades, focusing on the historical development mainly in relation to pedagogical advancements and technological integrations. While unveiling the distinctive features, successes, challenges, trends, and impacts, it provides useful insights on future directions for effective teacher education via ODL in similar contexts.

Contents

Abstract	iii
Foreword <i>Snr. Prof. P.M.C. Thilakarathne, Vice-Chancellor, OUSL</i>	vii
Message <i>Dr. Tony Mays, Director:Education, COL</i>	x
Message <i>Prof. Elsie Kotalawela, Founder Head/Dept. of Education, OUSL</i>	xii
Preface <i>Snr. Prof. Shironica P. Karunanayaka, COL Chair, OUSL</i>	xiii
Acknowledgements	xv
List of Abbreviations	xvi
List of Tables	xviii
List of Figures	xix
Annexures	xx
Chapter 1	1
Introduction: <i>The Journey Begins</i>	
1.1 Research Focus	
1.2 Background to the Study	
1.3 Rationale and Significance	
1.4 Aim and Objectives	
Chapter 2	6
Review of Literature: <i>A Critical Analysis</i>	
2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Background	
2.2 Teacher Professional Development in Changing Paradigms of Education	
2.3 Distance Teacher Education in the Sri Lankan Context	
2.4 Conceptual Framework	

Chapter 3	22
Methodology: <i>A Qualitative Approach</i>	
3.1 Study Context	
3.2 Study Design	
3.3 Research Questions	
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis	
3.5 Ethical Considerations	
3.6 Study Limitations	
Chapter 4	32
Discussion of Findings: <i>Insights and Impacts</i>	
4.1 Development of Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL	
4.2 Pedagogical Changes in Teacher Education Programs at OUSL	
4.3 Technology Integration Initiatives in Teacher Education	
4.4 Key Trends in the Development of Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL	
Chapter 5	107
Concluding Remarks and Way Forward: <i>The Journey Continues!</i>	
5.1 Conclusions of the Study	
5.2 Implications of Key Findings	
5.3 Recommendations for the Future	
List of References	116
Commentaries	134
Annexures	144

Foreword

Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne

Vice-Chancellor, The Open University of Sri Lanka

I am pleased to write a foreword to a comprehensive research study titled “Teacher Education via Open and Distance Learning at The Open University of Sri Lanka: A Transformational Journey” conducted by Shironica P. Karunanayaka. The study, supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) as part of the Annual Plan of the COL Chair (Teacher Education) at OUSL, delves into the historical development of teacher education at OUSL from 1980 to 2023. It examines the transformational changes that have occurred over four decades, focusing on pedagogical advancements and technological integrations in teacher education programs delivered through the ODL mode.

Education stands as the cornerstone of societal progress, empowering individuals to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving world. In this pursuit, teachers emerge as catalysts of transformation, tasked not only with imparting knowledge but also with nurturing critical thinking and adaptability among learners. As educational paradigms shift to accommodate the demands of the modern age, the role of teachers transcends traditional boundaries, necessitating continuous professional development and innovative pedagogical approaches.

At the forefront of educational innovation stands the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), a beacon of accessible and flexible learning opportunities.

Since its inception in 1980, OUSL has been committed to democratizing education, offering open and distance learning (ODL) programs that cater to diverse learners, including aspiring and practicing teachers. Through its pioneering initiatives, OUSL has not only expanded access to higher education but has also played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of teacher education in Sri Lanka.

This monograph explores the transformative journey of teacher education at OUSL through the lens of open and distance learning. Spanning four decades of innovation and adaptation, this journey is characterized by a relentless pursuit of excellence, driven by the commitment to empower educators with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

Drawing upon a rich tapestry of historical insights, pedagogical advancements, and technological integrations, this monograph seeks to unravel the intricacies of teacher education via ODL at OUSL. Through a comprehensive analysis of key milestones, successes, challenges, and future prospects, it offers a holistic perspective on the evolution and impact of OUSL's teacher education programs. Further, it examines the transformational changes that have occurred over four decades, focusing on pedagogical advancements and technological integrations in teacher education programs delivered through the ODL mode. Key findings of the research monograph include the evolution and impact of teacher education programs and practices at OUSL, supplemented by a comprehensive website serving as an open-access e-resource collating relevant articles published between 1980-2023.

As we embark on this journey of exploration and reflection, we invite readers to delve into the vibrant tapestry of experiences, insights, and aspirations that define teacher education via ODL at OUSL. Together, let us celebrate the transformative power of education and reaffirm our commitment to fostering a brighter future for generations to come.

Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne

Vice-Chancellor

The Open University of Sri Lanka

Message

Dr. Tony Mays

Director: Education, Commonwealth of Learning

The world does not have enough teachers to ensure universal access to secondary education and we are not attracting and training enough new teachers to fill the gap. Despite global calls for greater investment in education, many countries have experienced a fiscal decline which has reduced the available budget and limited the ability to build many more new schools and staff them with new teachers. This means the teachers we do have in the system are even more precious and we need to find ways to ensure that we maximize the impact of these professionals through increased use of technology-enabled learning, blended and online distance provision.

However, most teachers' practice has been shaped by their own experience first as school-based learners, then as teacher-trainees in campus-based provision, and then as classroom-teachers on physical school campuses. The closure of school campuses due to a pandemic, a climate event or civil unrest, or a range of other reasons, means that education systems are not as resilient as they could be. Moreover, new generations of connected learners with access to a growing range of generative artificial intelligence options and other resources have changing expectations of formal education provision. This means that teachers need to constantly rethink both what and how they teach.

Supporting teachers both to lead and respond to change therefore requires continuous professional development (CPD) of these teachers in ways that do not impact on their time in the classroom, but which also enable them to work in new ways to reach learners unable to access conventional campus-based provision. Using ODL for CPD is a logical means to that end. It has the potential not only to expose teachers to new ideas, new technical tools and more open pedagogies but it can do so in ways which model emerging good practices.

This monograph on “Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL” is therefore not only a useful reflection for OUSL itself but also provides insights from experience that will be of benefit to other education institutions and systems involved in or contemplating the use of ODL for teacher development. Based both on document review and semi-structured interviews, the study tells the story of OUSL’s work in teacher development over 40 years, identifying not only strategies that can and do work but also being honest about the many challenges faced in the process. We can all learn vicariously from such reflection.

Tony Mays, PhD
Director: Education
Commonwealth of Learning

Message

Emeritus Professor Elsie Kotalawela

Founder Head/Department of Education, OUSL

Teacher education through the distance mode!

Without any previous experience, the big question was, “how to begin?”

The answer was, “just begin!”

At the beginning it was very challenging with a small number of staff, who were exceptionally dedicated even though they only had meager resources. Amidst the challenges, we achieved success, with a very high demand for teacher education through the distance mode. The most difficult task was to cater for the students in the study centers in the remote areas, without diminishing the quality. In the absence of new technologies, the demand placed on individuals was vast. It shows how much difference individuals can make, to introduce and maintain high standards in teacher education even in the distance mode. We initially started as a Unit of Education, and within a few years we were able to become a Department of Education, and later a Faculty of Education. As the founder Head of the Unit of Education and the Department of Education, I personally feel content about the progress we have made. With the support of innovative pedagogies and new technologies to bridge the gap, I wish the Faculty of Education success in its future endeavors in the field of teacher education through the distance mode!

Emeritus Professor Elsie Kotalawela

Founder Head/Department of Education

The Open University of Sri Lanka

Preface

Open and distance learning (ODL) offers transformative pathways to reimagine teacher education. It provides a multitude of prospects for educators in fulfilling their professional development needs and aspirations. With the rapid expansion of educational innovations in the digital age, the convergence of technology and pedagogy has opened many doors to exciting and unique opportunities for teacher education. Thus, ODL empowers educators to embark on a journey of lifelong learning that enhances and enriches their professional practice.

The inspiration to develop this monograph stems from my own strong passion for teacher education. With several decades of enriching experience in navigating this noble profession – being a practitioner at the Faculty of Education at OUSL for over thirty years, and as a former schoolteacher for ten years – I have witnessed the recurring complexities and transformations in the field. Being appointed as a COL Chair in Teacher Education in April 2023 motivated me to undertake a comprehensive research study to delve into the historical development of providing teacher education through the ODL mode. This critical enquiry mainly explores the adoption of innovative pedagogies and technologies in teacher education practices, while uncovering the dynamic interplay between theory and practice, as well as traditions and innovations, during the transformational journey of teacher education through ODL at OUSL since 1980.

The scope of this monograph encompasses the documentary research that traced the historical trajectory of the university's journey in teacher education, complemented by participants' retrospective accounts captured through interviews held with a selected group of academics. Through meticulous analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, this study offers multifaceted perspectives that illustrate the challenges, achievements, and lessons learned over four decades of teacher education via ODL.

This monograph is a testament not only to the immense potential of ODL in enriching the field of teacher education, but also to the visionary leadership, power of perseverance, and dedicated efforts made at the Faculty of Education at OUSL to foster innovation in teacher education through collaborative communities of practice. Through rigorous inquiry and reflective practice, this publication seeks to inspire practitioners to embrace change, challenge convention, and cultivate innovation.

I invite you to enjoy our transformational journey revealed through the pages of this monograph, discover new insights, and be inspired to enrich your own professional practice and contribute to the ongoing advancements in the field of teacher education!

Shironica P. Karunanayaka, EdD

COL Chair (Teacher Education)
Senior Professor in Educational Technology
Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education,
Faculty of Education,
The Open University of Sri Lanka.

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Shironica P. Karunanayaka
(Author)

List of Abbreviations

AAOU	Asian Association of Open Universities
ABA	Activity-Based Assignments
ABAD	Activity-Based Assignment Day Schools
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ACPE	Advanced Certificate in Preschool Education
AR	Action Research
BEdDT	Bachelor of Education Honors in Drama and Theatre
BEdNS	Bachelor of Education Honors in Natural Sciences
BEdPE	Bachelor of Education Honors in Primary Education
CA	Continuous Assessment
CAT	Continuous Assessment Test
C-DELTA	Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action
CETMe	Center for Educational Technology and Media
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CONTESSA	Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPE	Certificate in Preschool Education
CVCD	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors
DBR	Design-Based Research
DDE	Department of Distance Education
DECPE	Diploma in Early Childhood and Primary Education
DEMP	Distance Education Modernization Project
DFID	Department of International Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECPE	Early Childhood and Primary Education
ELM	Educational Leadership and Management
ESA	External Services Agency
ET	Educational Technology
FoE	Faculty of Education
HSS	Humanities and Social Sciences
ICDE	International Council for Open and Distance Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMM	Interactive Multimedia
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LDT	Learning Design and Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MAEd	Master of Arts in Education
MATE	Master of Arts in Teacher Education
MATE-I	Master of Arts in Teacher Education-International
MEd	Master of Education

MoE	Ministry of Education
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
MST	Mathematics, Science, and Technology
MTE	Master of Teacher Education
NAAC	National Accreditation and Assessment Council
NACs	NODES Access Centers
NEC	National Education Commission
NIE	National Institute of Education
NODES	National Online Distance Education Service
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
ODDE	Open, Distance, and Digital Education
ODeL	Open, Distance, and e-Learning
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OEP	Open Educational Practices
OER	Open Educational Resources
OFDL	Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning
OUSL	Open University of Sri Lanka
PCF	Pan Commonwealth Forum
PGDDE	Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education
PGDE	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
PGDELM	Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QA	Quality Assurance
QAAC	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council
ROER4D	Research on Open Educational Resources for Development
SACTED	South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education and Development
SAFDED	South Asia Federation for Distance Education Development
SCCARS	Support Center for Children and Adolescents in Risk Situations
SDL	Self-Directed Learning
SLIDE	Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education
SLQF	Sri Lanka Qualification Framework
SNE	Special Needs Education
SRL	Self-Regulated Learning
STE	Secondary and Tertiary Education
TEL	Technology-Enhanced Learning
TETD	Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment
THA	Take-Home Assignments
THTF	Tower Hall Theatre Foundation
TPACK	Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UGC	University Grants Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of the documentary search

Table 2: Summary of the interview participants

Table 3: Increase in staff numbers from 1982 to 2002

Table 4: Number of awardees in key study programs (1981-2023)

List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 2: Student enrolment in the PGDE program (1980-2002)

Figure 3: Student enrolment in the CPE program (1980-2002)

Figure 4: Academic staff of the Faculty of Education (2003)

Figure 5: New building of the Faculty of Education (2009)

Figure 6: COL Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials

Figure 7: Original Study Pack of the MATE-I program

Figure 8: Concept Map “Our Vision for Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL”

Annexures

Annexure 1: Time frame of the study

Annexure 2: Ethical approval

Annexure 3: Information letter and consent form

Annexure 4: Interview schedule

Annexure 5: List of key administrative officers (1981-2023)

Annexure 6: List of programs of study (1981-2023)

1

Introduction: *The Journey Begins*

This chapter introduces the research focus on teacher education through ODL, explains the background to the investigation and highlights the rationale and significance of the study. It also outlines the aim and objectives of the study.

1.1 Study Focus

Education plays a pivotal role in developing human potential to meet challenges posed by a rapidly changing world. Persistent challenges such as global warming, the accelerated digital revolution, growing inequalities, and devastating pandemics call for transformational changes in educational systems so as to ensure that quality learning is made accessible to everybody throughout life (UNESCO, 2021). Teachers are agents of educational change and societal improvement (Fullan, 2015; 1993). As such, they are expected to be proactive in managing the process of change in educational systems. For instance, teachers are expected to develop their competencies in creating effective learning environments to suit the needs of the 21st century learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Schleicher, 2012). Preparing teachers for such a changing world essentially requires well-designed teacher professional development programs.

Open and distance education plays a significant role in catering to teachers' growing needs for professional development opportunities by

giving them more flexibility in access and choices. Since the 1960s, open and distance education methodologies have been used for teacher education and training to solve issues pertaining to teacher supply both in terms of numbers and quality of performance (Robinson & Latchem, 2003). The establishment of open universities has provided a mechanism for implementing large-scale teacher training programs through the open and distance learning (ODL) mode (Perraton, 2010). Therefore, it is expected that the merging of the spheres of ODL and teacher education would help understand and address wider issues linked with educational policymaking and practice in specific contexts (Danaher & Umar, 2010). As such, this research study focuses on gaining insights on good practices for effective teacher education via ODL.

1.2 Background to the Study

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), which is the only open university in Sri Lanka, is one of the 17 national universities under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka. OUSL makes a significant contribution to the higher education system in Sri Lanka through its unique ODL approach, by offering open and flexible access to higher education and continuing professional development opportunities for diverse groups of learners, especially catering to the educational needs of working adults in various fields of study (see <https://www.ou.ac.lk/>).

Since its inception in 1980, OUSL has initiated and implemented teacher education programs to fulfill the crucial need of teachers for professional development through its (then) Department of Education, and

the (later established) Faculty of Education. Over the years, teacher education programs implemented at OUSL via ODL have continuously expanded and extended in many ways including pedagogical advancements and technological integrations.

The current research study titled “Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL” was conducted at OUSL during a period of eight months from September 2023 to April 2024, with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), as part of the Annual Plan of the COL Chair (Teacher Education) at OUSL (See Annexure 1: Time frame of the study). The study focused on the historical development of teacher education at OUSL with a view to identifying the transformational changes that had occurred between 1980 and 2023. It involved a systematic investigation and analysis of existing publications, documents, and other artefacts related to this focus. This research monograph is a key output of the study, supplemented with a website created as an open access e-resource collating relevant articles published between 1980-2023 (see <https://tedodlousl.wordpress.com/>).

Based on the findings of the study, this monograph presents a critical review of significant changes that have occurred in the implementation of teacher education via ODL at OUSL over four decades, with a view to sharing good practices and indicating implications for future developments.

1.3 Rationale and Significance

Teacher Education is a critical area of study in any country. Within the changing paradigms of education, teachers, as change agents, need competency development to lead, influence, promote and support change

implementation and management in their educational institutions (Fullan, 2015). Teachers play a significant role in shaping the future generations. Hence, effective professional development of teachers is essential. In the current Sri Lankan educational system, teacher education programs are implemented by numerous educational institutions for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Sethunga et al., 2016). While most of these programs offered by the conventional universities adopt the face-to-face learning mode, all the teacher education programs implemented by OUSL entirely adopt the ODL mode.

Even though many studies have been conducted and research published on various initiatives related to teacher education programs implemented by OUSL since the 1980s, these have not been systematically reviewed and synthesized so far. It is envisaged that a thorough review and an in-depth qualitative analysis of the significant changes that have occurred for over four decades from 1980 to 2023 in providing teacher education via the ODL mode at OUSL, especially in terms of pedagogical advancements and technological integrations, will provide useful insights for productive enhancements in the future teacher professional development initiatives via ODL.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of the research study was to review the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL from 1980 to 2023.

The specific objectives of the overall study are as follows:

- to identify key trends in the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL;
- to examine how pedagogies in teacher education programs have changed over time;
- to examine how technology has impacted on teacher education over time;
- to identify good practices and areas for future developments in teacher education;
- to create and publish a website as an open access e-resource compiling related artefacts; and
- to create and publish a narrative account of the study as a research monograph.

2

Review of Literature: A *Critical Analysis*

A comprehensive review of literature on ODL and teacher professional development is presented in this chapter. Diverse perspectives, principles, theories, and frameworks related to ODL, adult learning, pedagogical approaches, technology-enhanced learning, and learning experience design reveal the multi-dimensional nature of providing teacher education through the ODL mode. A conceptual framework grounded in theoretical and empirical literature related to ODL practices in teacher education is provided at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Background

In this section, a range of concepts and theoretical frameworks related to ODL are examined and reviewed, to build up a clear understanding of the complexities and dynamics of this mode of study in the context of teacher professional development.

2.1.1 *Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning*

Perspectives related to 'distance education' and 'open education' have evolved throughout the changing education paradigms. The roots of distance education can be traced back to the 'correspondence courses' that began in the middle of the 19th century (Moore, 2022). The concepts and practices of distance education evolved more prominently

during the 1970s and 1980s (Bozkurt, 2019). With the rapid flow of information and advancements in technologies available for information delivery, the scope of distance education is constantly changing. Nevertheless, the fundamental view of the concept of distance education as a form of education where students and teachers are separated in time and/or place during the teaching-learning process, which distinguishes it from the traditional face-to-face teaching, remains unchanged. Further, this temporal and/or physical separation can lead to psychological and communications gaps, termed as 'transactional distance', between the learners and instructors in distance education settings (Moore, 1997). The key characteristics of distance education have been identified as physical separation of teacher and learner in terms of geographical location, intervention of an educational organization, use of multimedia courseware to unite the teacher and learner, availability of channels for two-way communication, possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings, and an industrialized process of operation (Holmberg, 1977; Keegan, 1980; Moore, 1973; Peters, 1994). Distance education modes have gradually changed from the original correspondence education to contemporary online education, the driving force behind this evolution being the use of various contemporary communication technologies to bridge the distance between learners and teachers (Moore, 2022).

Historically, different 'generations' of distance education models have been classified based on the delivery technologies being adopted: Correspondence (print), Multimedia (print/audio/video/computer-based/interactive video), Tele-learning (broadcast television/radio/teleconferencing/video conferencing), Flexible Learning (interactive multimedia/online/web-based), and Intelligent Flexible

Learning (interactive multimedia/web-based/automated response systems) (Taylor, 2001). Nevertheless, the proliferation of new digital delivery modes with the merging of diverse media and digital platforms has blurred the distinctions between generations of distance education modes (Burns, 2023). The rise of digital technologies has had a direct impact on the notion of open education (Weller, 2020), which is also closely associated with distance education.

The 'open' movement has notably impacted on changing educational practices (Conole & Brown, 2018), particularly in the sphere of distance education practices (Bozkurt et al., 2015). With the establishment of the Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969, many other institutions worldwide have followed suit adopting the 'Open University model' (Tait, 2018). Open education fundamentally refers to removing barriers to learning and expanding opportunities for learning (Bates, 2022; Lane, 2016). It encompasses resources, tools, and practices that employ a framework of open sharing to improve access to and effectiveness of education worldwide and seeks to scale educational opportunities by combining the traditions of knowledge creation and sharing with the 21st century technology (Open Education Consortium, n.d.). Open education is an evolving, multi-faceted concept, described as a 'kaleidoscope' visualizing attractive images, yet with unpredictable perspectives (Conole, & Brown, 2018), and having an 'octopus-like' nature with many tentacles connected to the core concept of 'open' (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). The shift towards 'openness in education' implies removing barriers to learning, sharing resources, collaboration, co-creation, innovation, flexibility, affordability, cost-efficiency, transparency, freedom, and social justice (Bozkurt et al., 2023). Thus, integrating open practices in education

enhances accessibility, inclusivity, and equity in education, with the underlying value principle that 'education is a common good' (Cronin et al., 2023).

Recent attention has been directed more towards considering open education as a social movement democratizing learning, aligned with principles of social justice and equality of access to education (Kalz, 2023; Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018; Lambert, 2018). Different layers of collective action in open education have been identified as emancipation of people through education, emancipation of learners and teachers within education, emancipation of education, and emancipation from organized education (Lane, 2016). Accordingly, open education can be viewed as a driver in executing distance education practices to bring a sense of social justice and equal opportunities for all. Realization of the value of distance education as a viable response to the growing demands of higher education has resulted in this originally 'non-traditional' form of education being progressively adopted by the mainstream educational forces, thus opening up further educational opportunities (Naidu, 2014).

Evidently, the two terms 'open learning' and 'distance learning' are complementary and thus often used together as 'Open and Distance Learning' (ODL). Whereas distance education refers to teaching and learning that temporarily separates teacher and learner in terms of time and/or place, and involves using multiple media, two-way communication channels, and occasional face-to-face meetings to bridge the gap, ODL provides distance education opportunities that help mitigate or remove barriers to access learning (COL, 2023). Based on a critical examination of these two notions from different perspectives, distance education and ODL

are defined together, as “any learning activities within formal, informal and non-formal domains that are facilitated by information and communication technologies to lessen distance, both physically and psychologically, and to increase interactivity and communication among learners, learning sources and facilitators” (Bozkurt, 2019, p. 267).

The rapid expansion in technology-enhanced delivery modes has resulted in the emergence of a variety of concepts linked with open and distance education such as online learning, blended learning, distributed learning, hybrid learning, and HyFlex learning. In addition, over the years more modern terminology such as ‘Open, Distance, and e-Learning’ (ODeL) (Ayoko, 2024), ‘Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning’ (OFDL) (ICDE, 2023), and ‘Open, Distance, and Digital Education’ (ODDE) (Zawacki-Richter, & Jung, 2023), has also emerged. With the rise of digital media, traditional boundaries between distance education and face-to-face educational practices are fading away. The above-mentioned established and emerging terms lie along a continuum between these two key modes (Zawacki-Richter, & Jung, 2023). Whilst the need for technologically mediated interaction in ODL is significant, alignment of pedagogical designs with emerging technologies under the guidance of relevant theories and frameworks is equally vital (Anderson & Dron, 2011).

2.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives related to Teacher Education via ODL

Early theories on distance education are categorized as industrialization theories, independence and autonomy theories, and interaction and communication theories (Keegan, 1986). Newer theories focused more on teaching, learning, and communication processes, rather than the

organizational and structural aspects of distance education (Evans & Jakupec, 2023). For instance, educational transaction, learner control, and communication are highlighted as core concepts in the Communication and Learner Control Theory (Garrison, 2000). Notably, many theories on distance education emphasize not only the independence and autonomy of learners, but also the need for interaction and communication among learners and teachers (Holmberg, 1995; Keegan, 1996; Moore, 1997, Wedemeyer, 1981). Particularly, the Transactional Distance Theory (Moore, 1997) emphasizes that effective distance education involves managing the psychological and communication space between the instructor and learners, rather than the spatial or temporal distance. Accordingly, balancing learner autonomy with structured instructional support and meaningful interaction is an essential requirement in ODL (Keegan, 1996). In the context of teacher education, this implies providing opportunities for student teachers in ODL to autonomously engage with content, while receiving adequate learner support and interactive learning experiences.

The enhanced accessibility, flexibility, and adaptability of the ODL mode makes it particularly appropriate for adult learning. As highlighted in andragogy—the theory of adult learning, more independent and self-directed learning where students become autonomous learners who take responsibility for their own learning (Knowles, 1984) is pertinent in ODL. Self-directed learning (SDL) is a process where “individuals take the initiative with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, implementing learning strategies, and evaluating achievement of learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18), which helps students develop

abilities to self-regulate their teaching-learning process. Self-regulated learning (SRL), as a self-directive process, allows learners transform their mental abilities into task-related skills to engage in appropriate actions to pursue academic goals, while self-monitoring their progress towards goal-completion (Zimmerman, 2015). Promoting SDL and SRL is important, in particular, to support the development of professional competencies of student teachers in the ODL system, who are working adult learners from the teaching profession. Simultaneously, the development of a greater student-teacher relationship by providing adequate instructional support with an effective mix of media and methods is also a necessity in distant learning contexts (Wedemeyer, 1981).

Even though the early forms of distance education predominantly characterized firstly behaviorist, and, later, cognitivist models of learning (Anderson & Dron, 2010), with the proliferation of digital technologies, novel pedagogical approaches based on constructivist views of learning are increasingly integrated with ODL. Especially, a social-constructivist approach to learning that emphasizes knowledge construction by learners through active engagement, collaboration, and interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) is much solicited in contemporary ODL. Constructivist views highlight the need to provide contextualized, authentic, and meaningful learning experiences (Jonassen et al., 1999), aligned with first principles of instruction (Merril, 2013) and situated learning principles (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Further, the constructivist view promotes reflective learning that emphasizes the intention to learn from current or prior experience (Moon, 2013), which is highly relevant in improving professional practices of teachers. Designing learning experiences promoting 'reflection-in-action', and 'reflection-on-action' (Schön, 1983)

enables student teachers to engage in a process of critical reflective practice for their continuous self-improvement, allowing them to meaningfully apply theory into practice. Facilitating professional development of teachers through ODL methods thus requires purposefully designed, rich learning experiences (Holmes et al., 2011), to ensure that meaningful, contextualized teacher education takes place.

Technology-enabled learning environments augmented with computer-mediated communication, computer-supported collaborative work, and computer-based cognitive tools offer alternative, innovative approaches to facilitating learning and knowledge construction in distance education settings (Jonassen et al., 1995). The integration of digital technologies in ODL enables more flexible, and interactive learning for students. For instance, online and blended learning promotes effective, efficient, and engaging ('e3') instruction (Merril, 2013), by providing flexible access to diverse learning resources and collaborative learning activities (Cleveland-Innes, & Wilton, 2018). Further, digital networks afford unique learning opportunities through synchronous and asynchronous interactive learning. Online learning, which offers the possibility of engaging in a variety of interactions such as those between student-student, student-teacher, student-content, teacher-teacher, teacher-content, and content-content (Anderson & Garrison, 1998; Moore, 1993), facilitates building learning communities (Wenger, 1998). As established in the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 2000), interactions among the cognitive, teaching, and social presences in online learning environments are vital in creating collaborative learning communities. Accordingly, advocating technology-enabled interactions and collaboration is useful in promoting

professional networking among teachers, to foster the creation of professional learning communities.

The design of meaningful technology-enabled learning experiences in ODL will depend on an appropriate blend of content with pedagogy, and technology, as explicated in the TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Three key forms of knowledge—content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge and their complex interactions that create new kinds of knowledge sustain productive technology-enabled learning. TPACK allows teacher competency development in the effective integration of technology in the teaching-learning process, and guides teachers to function as ‘designers of learning experiences’ (Koehler et al., 2016). Therefore, the affordances of novel technologies and innovative pedagogies need to be adequately exploited in the design of professional development programs via ODL, to meet the diverse needs of teachers and other educators in various contexts.

As discussed above, current trends in ODL reflect a dynamic and technology-driven landscape. ODL broadens access, offers flexibility, and streamlines opportunities for teacher professional development in a multitude of ways. Emerging as well as established theories related to distance education, pedagogical approaches, and technological integration provide a strong base to the current investigation. These theoretical perspectives underpin the influence of ODL in teacher education and provide insights into their application in contemporary educational contexts.

2.2 Teacher Professional Development in Changing Paradigms of Education

Paradigm shifts in education have been driven by various factors pertaining to industrialization, the emergence of modern sciences, technological advancements, and globalization. Numerous educational trends in the 21st century including innovative pedagogies and novel technologies significantly affect the processes of teaching and learning (EDUCAUSE, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). As such, understanding the changing nature of knowledge required in the digital age and its appropriate utilization is crucial for both teachers and learners. Individuals living in the 21st century need to exercise greater independence and judgement accompanied by a stronger sense of personal responsibility for achieving their common goals (Delors, 1999). Similarly, in the 21st century, the teaching-learning process requires the development of critical competencies such as learning skills, literacy skills, life skills, digital skills, soft skills, and transversal skills (Joynes et al., 2019). Thus, teachers are now expected to be well-prepared to cater to the needs of the 21st century learners and support them to develop the skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2022).

Obviously, these paradigm shifts necessitate changing teacher cognition and practices in order to cater to the needs of a rapidly evolving society. For teachers to function as leaders and agents of educational change (Fullan, 2015), they need to proactively engage in continuous personal and professional development (Quinn, 1996). Thus, both pre-service and in-service teachers require support to develop themselves professionally (Schleicher, 2012). Further, CPD of teacher educators, who train

prospective and practicing teachers, is also essential. Distance education methods have long been adopted in professional development programs for pre-service and in-service teachers as well as teacher educators in both developed and developing countries (Burns, 2023). Such ODL professional development programs should focus on various areas including development of teacher competencies on novel pedagogical approaches and technology integration.

ODL can lead to a transformation of pedagogical approaches, shifting away from traditional didactic methods to adopt more learner-centered, and learning-centered approaches. Tracing the historical development of the practice of providing teacher education through ODL reveals that constant advancements in educational technology are closely related to the evolution of educational paradigms thereof (Weller, 2020). These changes reflect a trajectory from early correspondence courses to online and mobile learning environments, to the adoption of artificial intelligences, micro-credentialling through blockchain, and global collaborative learning networks (Dron & Anderson, 2014). Various pedagogical innovations in ODL provide insights into the application of the same in the sphere of teacher education. For instance, innovative pedagogies including the flipped classroom, gamification, microlearning, experiential learning, adaptive learning, multiliteracies, and teachback (Peterson et al., 2018; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2023) can be effectively integrated into distance professional development programs designed for teachers. Further, all these powerful pedagogies can be augmented with artificial intelligence (Sharples, 2023). Empowering teachers through innovative pedagogies and technological integrations is a necessity in contemporary teacher education programs conducted via ODL.

Distance teacher education programs should also be committed to maintaining their academic quality (Burns, 2023; Perraton, 2010). Literature reveals various strategies explored and recommended to ensure the quality of teacher education provided through ODL, by addressing concerns regarding the lack of face-to-face interactions and hands-on teaching experiences. These include creating adequate learner support systems, providing mentorship, and opportunities for continuous professional development for ODL instructors, making technological support accessible to facilitate smooth course delivery, adopting authentic teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, facilitating peer support and collaborative learning, creating online communities and support networks, use of technology for simulated teaching experiences, and integrating reflective practice and action research (COL, 1999; Tait & Mills, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Burns, 2023).

2.3 Distance Teacher Education in the Sri Lankan Context

The current teacher education system and professional development opportunities available for teachers in Sri Lanka include pre-service programs that prepare individuals for the profession of teaching, and in-service programs offered to teachers who are already working in schools to update and upgrade their professional competencies. Teacher education programs are implemented by various educational institutions including Universities, National Colleges of Education, National Institute of Education, Teacher Training Colleges, and Teacher Centers (Sethunga et al., 2016). These programs are mainly conducted

in the conventional face-to-face learning mode, while the programs implemented by OUSL entirely adopt the unique ODL mode. Different teacher education programs may have their own strengths and limitations, yet all these initiatives aim at the capacity building of teachers and other educators in the field of education to function effectively and productively in the education system.

The history of distance teacher education in Sri Lanka dates back to 1972 with two key milestones: firstly, a Correspondence Teacher Education program that was implemented from 1972 until 1976, and, secondly, the External Services Agency (ESA) of the University of Sri Lanka, running in parallel with Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education (SLIDE) established in 1976, engaged in teacher training via correspondence. Later, incorporating both ESA and SLIDE, the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) was established in 1980 (Dock et al., 1988). Meanwhile, addressing a national need to clear a backlog of untrained non-graduate in-service teachers, a Distance Education Unit was established within the Ministry of Education in 1981, which was later taken over by the Department of Distance Education (DDE) in the National Institute of Education (NIE) which has implemented distance teacher education courses from 1984 (Amaragunasekara, 1992). Since 1980, OUSL has been continuously implementing numerous teacher education programs through ODL as its unique delivery mode.

From its inception, OUSL has provided distance teacher education for preschool, primary, and secondary school teachers. These programs have significantly expanded over the years as OUSL gradually moved through the different generations of distance education (Gunawardena &

Lekamge, 2010; Jayatilleke & Kulasekera, 2020). For instance, OUSL commenced with online course delivery in teacher education in 2003, Open Educational Resources (OER) integrated online course delivery in 2013, and many other novel initiatives such as conducting online open book examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Karunanayaka, 2022). Such progressive advancements in teacher education programs offered via ODL at OUSL have embraced both pedagogical and technological changes.

2.4 Summary

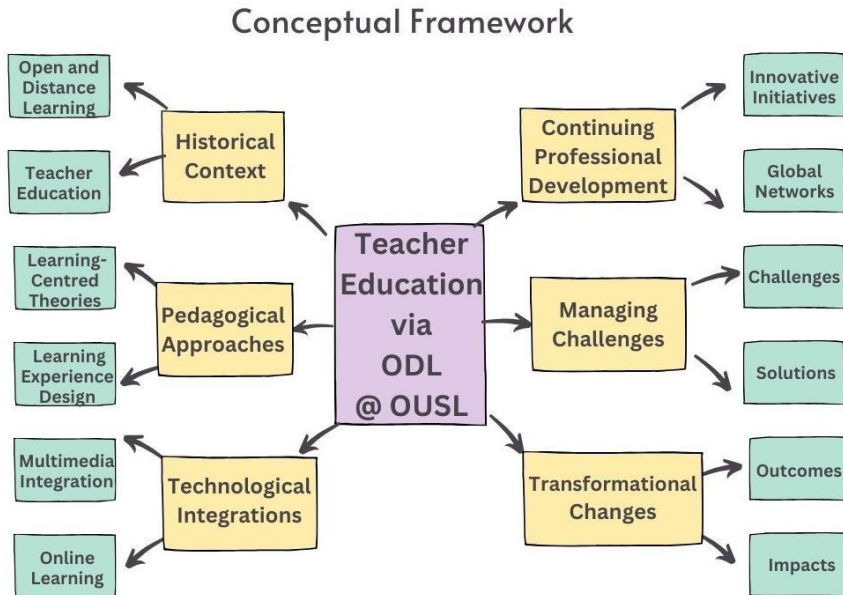
Teacher education programs offered through ODL have evolved to address contemporary challenges, aligned with shifts in educational paradigms, and driven by technological advancements. Current trends emphasize a focus on competency-based approaches, and innovative pedagogical methods to prepare educators to meet the complex demands of the 21st century learners. Ongoing research will continue to guide this transformative journey, ensuring that teacher education remains responsive to the evolving needs of teachers, learners, and society.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Based on the review of literature and synthesizing the key concepts, themes, and insights that emerged from the review, a conceptual framework for teacher education via ODL at OUSL was developed (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



This framework captures multifaceted aspects that influence the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of outcomes of teacher education initiatives through ODL, as indicated below:

- **Historical Context:** The evolution of teacher education through ODL in local and global contexts, considering the key trends and developments
- **Pedagogical Approaches:** Incorporation of learning-centered pedagogical approaches that promote active engagement, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning among learners

- Technological Integrations: Integration of audio-visual technologies, interactive multimedia, and online/blended learning to support teaching and learning
- Continuing Professional Development: Professional development opportunities for educators engaged in ODL for capacity enhancement through innovative initiatives and global networks
- Managing Challenges: Identification of challenges and strategies to manage the challenges, thereby promoting resilience among educators and learners in the ODL system
- Transformational Changes: Examination of the potential of ODL to bring about transformational changes in teacher education, evident through its impact and outcomes

The conceptual framework visualizes a holistic approach to providing teacher education through ODL, acknowledging the interrelations among a range of aspects. It provides a foundation for understanding the complexities involved in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of teacher education programs in an ODL context. Further, it provides directions to explore the effects of various dimensions of ODL in empowering educators through teacher education initiatives.

3

Methodology: A Qualitative Approach

This chapter outlines the context of the current study, the study design, specific research questions that this investigation addressed, and procedures adopted during the study. While detailing the documentary review methodology which was complemented by semi-structured interviews, it explains the criteria and procedural steps adopted in the collection and analysis of data. The chapter also presents the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.1 Context of the Study

The research study was conducted at the Faculty of Education (FoE) at OUSL. Even though the FoE at OUSL was officially established in 2003, the presence of an academic entity on “Education” at OUSL dates back to the inception of OUSL itself in 1980, first as an Education Unit, which later developed into a Department of Education. Currently, the FoE at OUSL consists of four departments of study: Secondary & Tertiary Education; Early Childhood and Primary Education; Special Needs Education; Educational Leadership and Management.

With its vision to be a leader of the advancement of knowledge and professional practice in education as a fundamental endeavor through ODL in Sri Lanka and in the Region, FoE offers a wide range of teacher education programs from certificate to postgraduate level. It is one of

the largest providers of initial and continuing professional development programs in Sri Lanka for schoolteachers, principals, teacher educators, and other personnel in the field of education, through the ODL mode. The present overall student enrollment at FoE exceeds 9,000.

3.2 Study Design

This study mainly focused on a critical analysis of existing publications, and other artefacts relevant to teacher education initiatives at OUSL to uncover significant shifts that have occurred over four decades in teacher education delivered via ODL. The investigation adopted documentary research methodology, which is a powerful approach used in educational research. Documentary research involves the systematic investigation and analysis of existing documents or records, which can be in the form of written or audio/visual materials (McCulloch, 2004). To accomplish the main aim and the objectives of the study, documentary research methodology was identified as appropriate and useful.

3.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study, which sought to review the practice of development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL from 1980 to 2023:

- What are the key trends in the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL?
- How have the pedagogical approaches adopted in teacher education at OUSL changed?

- What changes are observed in the integration of technology in teacher education at OUSL?
- What is the impact of ODL practices on enhancing teacher education initiatives at OUSL?
- What are the good practices and areas for future development in teacher education via ODL?

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The study involved a systematic investigation and a methodical analysis of existing articles, documents, and other artefacts relevant to teacher education initiatives at OUSL published during the period from 1980 to 2023. Parallel to the documentary review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected group of participants, to support, solidify and triangulate the data and verify findings. A combination of both inductive and deductive approaches was used in the analysis of qualitative data, to obtain a comprehensive understanding.

3.4.1 *Documentary Review*

Documentary analysis is a qualitative method involving examining and interpreting data to uncover meaning and gain understanding (Bowen, 2009; Grant, 2018). Nevertheless, assessing the value and the quality of the materials to ensure their authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Scott, 2006) was essential before extracting the content for analysis.

The following key steps were followed during the documentary review process:

- Systematic searching- A thorough and systematic search of documents was conducted to identify relevant resources (both electronic and non-electronic). Online sources included OUSL Website (OUSL Academic Research Repository; Research Publications of OUSL staff; OUSL Journal; OUSL Conference Proceedings; Faculty of Education Home Page; Academic Staff Members' profiles), Google Scholar, Databases, Local/International Conference Proceedings and Journals. Print sources included OUSL publications and relevant publications of other educational institutions. While keyword searching was used for online materials (e.g., keywords such as OUSL, ODL, Distance Education, Teacher Education), manual searching techniques were used for print materials.
- Establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria- Specific criteria for including and excluding documents were clearly defined to ensure that focus would be maintained on materials that directly contributed to the research study.
- Evaluating the documents- Once the documents were identified, their validity, and quality were evaluated, in terms of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning.
- Collecting the documents- The selected documents were collated and compiled in a Google drive after obtaining permission to access/copy/scan them, where necessary.
- Organizing the documents- The collected documents were systematically organized in such a manner as to make it easy to

locate and analyze relevant information. For this purpose, MS Excel Workbook was used as an organizational tool.

- Extracting key information- Relevant information was extracted from the documents by way of summarizing, categorizing, and coding data.
- Cross-referencing- Information retrieved from multiple sources was cross-referenced to ensure accuracy and reliability.
- Analyzing the data- The data collected from the documents were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and trends.
- Interpreting the data- The analyzed data were interpreted in relation to the research questions to reveal preliminary findings.

A summary of the documentary search, indicating the number of articles searched, identified, and selected is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of documentary search

Source	Total No. of articles searched	No. of articles identified as relevant	No. of articles selected
Online materials	3670	520	179
Print materials	94	94	72
Total	3764	614	251

3.4.2 *Semi-structured Interviews*

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen (14) participants selected purposively. The procedure followed is indicated below:

- Developing the instrument- A semi-structured interview schedule comprising of a list of guiding questions was developed and used as the instrument to gather data during the interviews. (Annexure 4)
- Obtaining informed consent- Email requests were sent to the identified participants with a detailed letter about the study. Their informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. (Annexure 3)
- Conducting the interviews- The interviews were scheduled with mutual agreement and each participant's interview lasted for 30-45 minutes. These interviews were audio recorded and carefully stored in the Google drive of the researcher.
- Transcribing the interviews- The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed using a free transcription tool in Microsoft Office, and the transcripts were stored and organized electronically.
- Editing and formatting the transcripts- All transcripts were cross-checked with the original audio recordings and edited to ensure the accuracy of information and formatted for clarity.
- Analyzing the transcribed data- The transcribed data were analyzed using thematic analysis and content analysis, following procedures such as coding and categorizing.

3.4.3 Selection of participants for the interviews

Fourteen (14) participants were selected for the interviews that were conducted to support the documentary review. They were selected from among the former and current academic staff members of OUSL, who were involved in various teacher education initiatives implemented by OUSL during the period from 1980 to 2023. The participants were selected through the purposive sampling method based on their involvement in the teacher education programs, considering factors such as representation of both genders (male and female), diverse disciplines of study, and specific periods during which they were involved in the teacher education programs at OUSL (to cover the period from 1980 to 2023). Table 2 provides a summary of the number of interview participants in terms of factors such as gender, whether they were in service or retired by the time of the study, and the period during which they joined OUSL.

An equal number of female and male staff members (7 each), and retired and in-service staff (7 each), were interviewed maintaining 50% representation from each category. While the majority (11) had 10-19 years of experience at OUSL, two participants had over 20 years' service, and only one participant had less than 10 years of experience. The participants also represented the four Departments of Study at FoE, proportionate with the number of staff in each department. The highest designation of all the participants were either Professor or Senior Lecturer, and a majority (11) have served in administrative positions such as Dean of the Faculty, or Head of Department.

Table 2*Summary of the interview participants*

Aspect	Number
Gender	
Female	7
Male	7
Retired/In-service (by 2023)	
Retired	7
In-service	7
Joined OUSL (period)	
1980-1990	1
1991-2000	2
2001-2010	10
2011-2023	1
Experience at OUSL (by 2023)	
20 years or more	2
10-19 years	11
Less than 10 years	1
Highest designation held (by 2023)	
Professor	5
Senior Lecturer	9
Administrative positions held (by 2023)	
Dean/Faculty	3
Head/Department	10
No administrative positions	3
Department/Area of study	
Secondary & Tertiary Education	9
Early Childhood and Primary Education	2
Special Needs Education	2
Educational Leadership & Management	1

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from OUSL Ethics Review Committee prior to the commencement of the research study (Annexure 2). Accordingly, the ethical procedures were maintained throughout the study, as described below.

Participation in the in-depth interviews was voluntary, and interviews were conducted only after obtaining the participants' informed consent in writing. It was ensured that confidentiality and privacy of the collected data and anonymity of the participants will be maintained, and the data will be used only for the purpose of the research study. Collected data are kept safely and confidentially. Electronic copies of interview transcripts are maintained under pseudonyms, and password protected for a period of three years from the time data were collected, at the end of which they will be deleted.

Necessary measures were taken to ensure that there will not be any violation of copyrights in relation to the artefacts used in the study. Formal permissions were obtained wherever necessary, especially since the research outputs are shared as open access publications with Creative Commons licenses.

3.6 Study Limitations

This research study was limited to studying the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL during the period from 1980 to 2023. It focused on the historical development of teacher education at OUSL

mainly in relation to pedagogical advancements and technological integrations. During the period of eight months allocated for this study, it was not feasible to focus on other aspects pertaining to teacher education at OUSL, which emerged from the rich qualitative data, and which are many in number.

The documentary review was limited to articles published during 1980-2023, predominantly in English. While a concerted effort was made to incorporate all articles that were accessible through an extensive online and print material search, there is a possibility that certain relevant articles have not been located or accessible during the search. However, the compilation of the retrieved articles in a dynamic website (<https://tedodlousl.wordpress.com/>) allows continuous updating of the materials.

The in-depth interviews were limited to a sample of fourteen (14) participants, representing pre-identified categories. Since the purpose of the interviews was to triangulate the findings of the documentary review, this number was considered adequate.

4

Discussion of Findings: *Insights and Impact*

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, based on an intensive analysis of data retrieved from the documentary review supplemented by semi-structured interviews. Addressing the five key research questions, it discusses the historical development of providing teacher education via ODL at OUSL, how pedagogies in teacher education programs have evolved, how technology has impacted teacher education, and key trends in the development of teacher education at OUSL, while managing challenges encountered during the journey spanning over four decades, from 1980-2023.

4.1 Development of Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL

This section explores the historical development of providing teacher education via ODL at OUSL from 1980 to 2023.

Journey from a Unit to a Faculty

The journey of the Faculty of Education at OUSL has been quite challenging yet, at the same time, highly dynamic and productive. It is indeed an exciting voyage from humble beginnings as a 'Unit of Education' in the 1980s, becoming a 'Department of Education' in 1987, and finally expanding to the status of a 'Faculty of Education' in 2003 and celebrating 20 years as a faculty in 2023. The inspiring story of the growth and

development of the faculty is due to the dedicated and committed contributions of many individuals throughout the years.

When OUSL was established in 1980, amalgamating SLIDE and ESA which were already providing distance education (DE) programs in several fields of study including education, two Boards of Study were created: Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS); and Management, Science, and Technology (MST), to offer these programs (Dock et al., 1988; Kotelawe & Samarasundera, 1986). However, by 1985, the names of the two boards of study were changed to Mathematics, Science, and Technology (MST) and Humanities, Social Sciences, and Management (HSS) (OUSL Annual Report, 1985). The Unit of Education operated under the Board of Study of HSS since 1980, with only three academic members at the very beginning. The founding Professor of Education, Prof. Elsie Kotalawela served as the first Head of the Unit of Education from 1981 to 1985, followed by Dr. Rupa Wijeratne from 1985 to 1987 (FoE Prospectus, 2003).

The original purpose of establishing 'open universities' was to offer a 'second chance' in higher education for those who had not had an opportunity for university education due to some reason. This initial purpose, however, has changed over the years adapting to the needs of different contexts (Kanwar & Mishra, 2023). OUSL too was established primarily with the intention of providing higher educational opportunities for working adults. Nevertheless, the underpinning principles of establishing OUSL further emphasized that "the idea of OUSL was not merely to cater to adult education but a concept that embodied the beliefs that learning was a life-long process and that all individuals had a right to be provided opportunities for such learning" (Raheem, 2010, p. 5). Even though OUSL was formed with this noble vision,

and as a national university under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka with the same legal and academic status as any other conventional national university, in the early stages there were many challenges due to the novelty of the concept of “openness” in university education. The challenges were not only about offering study programs using distance education methodologies but also about gaining confidence and acceptance of this novel mode of study in the local higher education system.

Distance Education was not the only challenge facing the new university; what was daunting was also the nature of its mission...The very title of the new university and its notion of ‘open’ entry were considered radical and provocative by a great majority in the university education system. Equally radical was the teaching methodologies proposed (Raheem, 2010, p. 9).

However, during its early stages OUSL suffered from the stigma of “second rate” education, because of the unique combination of an “open education policy” and a “distance mode” delivery. A major challenge was to ensure parity of esteem with counterpart conventional universities, and through that build confidence in the minds of employers (Coomaraswamy, 2013, p. 252).

Such reservations and doubts about ODL have affected the initial functions of the Unit of Education as well.

...They said that they don't believe in teacher education through distance education...They were not very convinced, so some of the senior people (external) refused to cooperate... so all these challenges were there in the first year, but we worked hard, and we even started the program...the second year was also a very confusing, tiring time...The first two three years were impossible!...
(IP1)

Nevertheless, from its commencement, the Unit of Education conducted two programs of study for teacher professional development— Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), and a Certificate in Preschool Education (CPE) which became very popular among pre-service and in-service teachers (Jaufar, 2018; Raheem, 2010).

From the start, education had been one of the OUSL's most popular fields of study. DE (distance education) in fact lent itself admirably to teacher enhancement and provided a means of continuous professional education for those who necessarily had to learn at a distance (Raheem, 2010, p. 40).

The 'open' access offered by OUSL has provided the teachers with a great opportunity to achieve their professional development and relevant qualifications in a more 'flexible' manner, at an 'affordable' price, which has resulted in attracting large numbers of students to these two programs from their inception. The PGDE program was conducted in the two national languages Sinhala and Tamil having an enrolment around 1,000-2,000 per year, while the CPE program was conducted in Sinhala and English, with around 400 students each year (FoE Prospectus, 2003).

...They (the teachers) wanted to develop themselves...but at the same time they faced difficulties...it's not easy to balance your personal life as well as your official things. So, they just waited without getting any professional qualification. So, this (Open University) was a good chance for them...they got everything like course materials, and we had contact sessions as well...That was a good opportunity for many teachers. That's why I think thousands enrolled in PGDE from the beginning...there was a very big demand... (IP4)

...I suppose lots of people did not apply (for conventional universities) because they had to come to Colombo or Peradeniya. They had to be there the day before lectures...They preferred Open University because of the distance mode...they had to come to a center on a weekend, that's all... (IP1)

The open and distance mode—which allows flexibility in studying at students' own time, place, and pace, while they are working, and being provided with self-study instructional materials which are supplemented with occasional face-to-face sessions—has certainly been advantageous for in-service teachers, as evident from the remarkably high demand for the PGDE program. The CPE program was equally popular among already employed as well as aspiring preschool teachers.

The establishment of the regional centers of OUSL from the early years, such as Jaffna (1981), Kandy (1982), and Matara (1985), and further expansion of the network of regional and study centers in the succeeding years provided students from remote areas of the country with more

opportunities to engage in higher studies in the discipline of education. Even though travelling to the regional centers posed a challenge for the very limited number of staff available in the Education Unit at that time, they managed this obligation of catering to the needs of the students.

...We had to have lecturers go to regional centers also. That was the other challenge...We had to start at 3 o'clock in the morning and go there in time for day schools... (IP1)

In 1987, certain radical structural changes that took place at OUSL resulted in the creation of three Faculties instead of the two boards of study and the academic units were replaced by departments of study under the three faculties (Raheem, 2010). Accordingly, the Unit of Education became the 'Department of Education' under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS). Prof. Elsie Kotalawela served as the founding Head of the new department from 1987-1990, followed by Dr. Rupa Wijeratne. Later, Prof. Kotalawela served as the Dean of the Faculty of HSS during the period from 1990 to 1991. In 1993, Prof. Chandra Gunawardena joined as Professor of Education, and became the third Head of the Department of Education (FoE Prospectus, 2003). Prof. Gunawardena also served as the Dean of the Faculty of HSS from 1995 to 2001, and later became the founding Dean of the Faculty of Education in 2003.

The Department of Education has had a steady development during the period from 1987 to 2002, in terms of offering new study programs in different areas of study within the discipline of education, increasing student enrolments, and expanding its outreach all over Sri Lanka. For instance, several new programs at different levels of study were

introduced such as Bachelor of Education in Natural Sciences (BEdNS) in 1993, Master of Education (MEd) in 1994, Advanced Certificate in Preschool Education (ACPE) in 1995, and Master of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE) in 2000, catering to a variety of target groups. In addition, Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs had been introduced as far back as in 1984.

PGDE continued to be the most popular program at OUSL, attracting large numbers of in-service teachers each year, as is evident by the Annual Reports of OUSL.

The biggest increase in student enrolment is recorded in PGDE. Student enrolment in 1986 was 2,326, as compared to 710 in 1985. The demand for this program is very great indeed. The number awaiting to follow this program is such that catering to all of them over the next five years is almost a dream (OUSL Annual Report, 1986, p. 25).

The first convocation of OUSL was held on May 12, 1986, at Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, where 504 PGDE candidates were conferred the diplomas (OUSL Annual Report, 1986). In fact, it is particularly noteworthy that the first three OUSL convocations held in 1986, 1987, and 1988 were conducted solely for PGDE diplomates from the Department of Education (Jaufar, 2018). Moreover, students who had successfully completed the CPE program were also awarded certificates in 1986 (OUSL Annual Report, 1986). The tradition of hosting award ceremonies at OUSL commenced in 1988 for Certificate, Advanced Certificate, and Diploma level programs, with the participation of a

large number of students who had successfully completed CPE, and ACPE Programs. Added to this later was the Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education (DECPE) program.

The BEdNS program offered in 1993 was developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Natural Sciences. It was the first inter-faculty study program at OUSL where the students completed their first two years (Levels 3 and 4) of the BSc Degree Program at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and moved on to study courses in the discipline of Education at Levels 5 and 6 at the Department of Education, including a teaching practicum. Thus, this program enabled both in-service and prospective schoolteachers to become professionally qualified as teachers of Science/Mathematics (Kudaligama & Goonetilake, 1995). The student numbers were comparatively small in the BEdNS program, since most students preferred to proceed to level 5 in science courses and obtain the BSc degree first, and follow the PGDE program afterwards, despite the fact that both BEd and PGDE were given the same recognition by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the teacher promotional schemes at the time.

The MEd program, which commenced in 1994 with 30 students, was initially offered in Sinhala and English only. The main aim of this program was to expand higher educational opportunities available for schoolteachers, principals, and teacher educators who had completed a PGDE or BEd Degree Program. Improving students' research skills was a prime objective of this degree program, requiring them to complete a research dissertation after the completion of their coursework (Lekamge & Karunanayaka, 2004). This program also became vastly popular and received a large number of applications, which necessitated the conducting of selection tests to pick out

the students according to the available quota. Subsequently, it was offered in Tamil too, and, in 2018, expanded to Kandy and Jaffna regional centers as well.

The MATE program was developed with the aim of addressing an unmet national need for professional development of teacher educators in Sri Lanka (Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2008). Receiving financial assistance under the World Bank-funded Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment (TETD) Project of the MoE to develop this unique program, was a great achievement of the Department of Education:

...On reading an IBRD Mission report to Ministry of Education dealing with assistance for Secondary Education Development Project, I noted its remarks on [the] importance of professional education for teacher educators and the possibility of getting funds for developing such a program...Our proposal was accepted, and we received a grant of Rs.15 million, the total amount we budgeted for the project. Program development was completed, all equipment, multimedia/ICT, purchased and program implementation for a group of 75 commenced... (IP14)

By 2002, when OUSL had four (4) regional centers and sixteen (16) study centers, several study programs of the Department of Education (CPE, ACPE, PGDE, MEd) were offered in the regional centers and some of the study centers. With the expansion of the OUSL regional and study center network, student enrollment in various programs conducted by the Department has had a steady increase. Especially the enrollment numbers in the two most popular programs—PGDE and CPE— increased significantly although with some fluctuations between the years, as depicted in figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2

Student enrollment in the PGDE program from 1982 to 2002

(Source: FoE Prospectus, 2003, p.13)

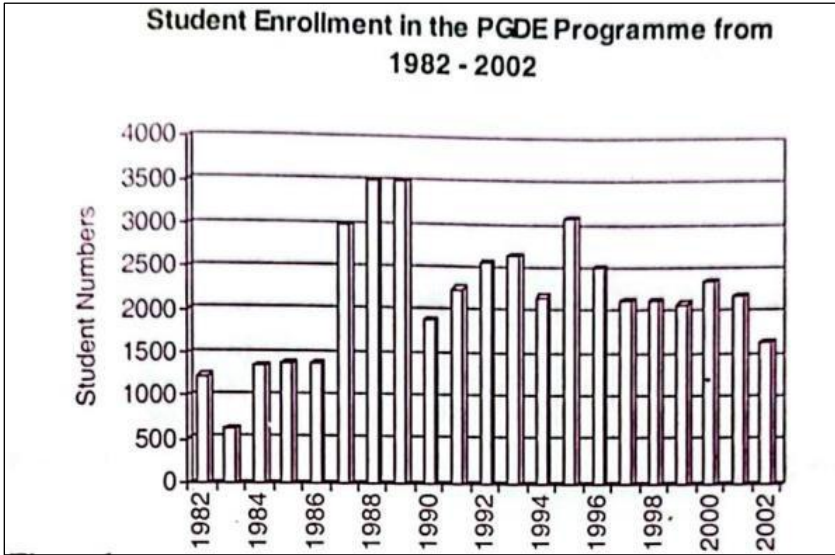
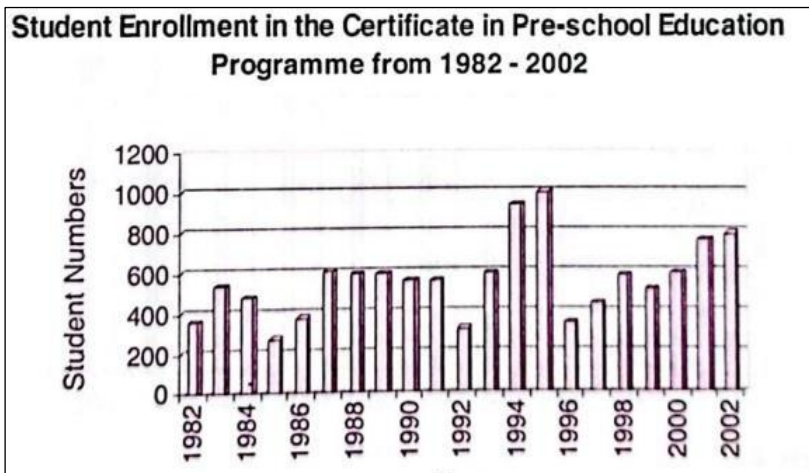


Figure 3

Student enrollment in the CPE program from 1982 to 2002

(Source: FoE Prospectus, 2003, p.13)



Similarly, as indicated in Table 3, staff numbers have also increased gradually over the years. By 2002, there were 21 academic staff members and 8 academic-support and non-academic staff members.

Table 3

Increase in staff numbers from 1982 to 2002
(Source: FoE Prospectus, 2003, p.12)

Designation	1982	1986	1992	1996	2002
Professor	1	1	1	1	1
Senior Lecturer	-	-	6	8	10
Probationary Lecturer	7	9	6	6	8
Educational Assistant	4	3	5	6	2
Staff Assistant	-	-	-	-	1
Clerk	1	1	2	2	1
Stenographer	-	-	-	1	2
Data cum Clerk	-	-	-	-	2
Peon		1	2	2	2

In order to cater to the very high demand for CPE and ACPE programs, a separate Department of Early Childhood Education was established in August 1999. This was the first ever department established in the Sri Lankan university system which specialized in early childhood education, thereby strengthening the University's contribution to this important area of study. The first Head of this Department was Dr. Wimala Palihakkara. In addition to the CPE and ACPE programs, the department started developing a DECPE, and a Bachelor of Education in Primary Education (BEPE). These programs enabled a gradual study progression for students from Level 1 (Certificate), Level 2 (Advanced Certificate), and Levels 3 and 4 (Diploma/Higher Diploma) to Level 6 (Bachelor's Degree), which distinctly exemplifies the typical concept of "Ladder of Opportunities" made available by OUSL.

Another important landmark in preschool teacher education was the establishment of model preschools named "Supipi" in 1991, first in Colombo and Kandy Regional Centers, and later expanded to Matara regional center. These model preschools served as "teaching laboratories" for the student teachers of the CPE and ACPE programs.

...The preschool was used as a lab...students were grouped and...one week was assigned to a group of students to come to the university and observe how children behave with the lecturer...lecturer was always there, guiding them...The purpose of [its] Establishment [was] to use it as a teaching lab for preschool teachers... (IP4)

In addition, the Department also commenced facilitating a “daycare center” at OUSL. This was followed by the establishment of a Child Study Center in June 2000 with the aim of conducting research related to early childhood development and improving the quality of the relevant study programs (FoE Prospectus, 2003).

From the inception, an extensive number of students of the Department of Education have been awarded postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate degrees, and bachelor’s degrees at the OUSL convocations. Similarly, the OUSL award ceremonies comprised large numbers of awardees of CPE, ACPE, and DECPE programs of the Department of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Along with the large number of student enrollments, the completion rates have also been constantly high (generally above 80%) in both these departments (OUSL Annual Reports, OUSL Statistical Handbooks).

Further, with the intention of ensuring continuous quality improvement of its service, the Department of Education underwent two major quality reviews during the period from 1999 to 2000, one through a Council-appointed Committee, and another through a quality assurance project under the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD). The encouraging findings of these reviews enabled the Department to acquire recognition as a leading center for educational studies in Sri Lanka (FoE Prospectus, 2003). The Department of Education was one among two departments of study at OUSL to voluntarily submit to a pilot quality review (Raheem, 2010).

The significant advancements in the two departments eventually paved the way for the establishment of a Faculty of Education in 2003. The founder Dean of the Faculty of Education, Prof. Chandra Gunawardena's reflection reveals the background to this historical achievement:

In view of the fact that several programs of study on early childhood education were conducted at the OUSL, through the VC we applied to the UGC that a new Department should be established here. It was granted, and later the establishment of the Department of Special Needs Education was also approved. In view of the fact that our departments were catering to a large number of students and as we had several staff members with PhDs, with expertise and experience in research, I, in consultation with them, applied to the UGC to upgrade the Department to Faculty status... I thought that we had a case, to ask for Faculty status...Why a Faculty of Education for the OUSL...I had to justify that we were catering to so many students (Karunanayaka, 2018, p. 16).

The request made by OUSL to establish a Faculty of Education was approved by the (UGC) in 2002. Accordingly, on February 1, 2003, the Faculty of Education at OUSL was officially established as the second Faculty of Education in the Sri Lankan state university system. This was a significant accomplishment for the University, as evidenced by the following quotes:

With the establishment of the new Faculty of Education we have reached another milestone in the history of the Open University of Sri Lanka. The Department of Education, which was the largest both in

terms of staff and student strength, and in terms of activities together with the Department of Early Childhood Education have been carved out of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and reshaped as the Faculty of Education. I am confident that this reshaping will strengthen the development and maintenance of academic programs, pursuance of research activities, and organization of extension activities. - *Vice-Chancellor, OUSL, 2003* (FoE Prospectus, 2003, p. 1).

This certainly is a major landmark development in the national university system...The establishment of this Faculty has been long overdue given the mighty demands placed on the university system in blending with the challenges the country needs to face within the emerging new demand in human resource development in particular...Today, the time has come for our colleagues in the Department of Education to progress further as an independent entity. This change will certainly pave the way for you to emerge as a center of excellence in education through independent and innovative initiatives. - *Dean/Faculty of HSS, 2003* (FoE Prospectus, 2003, p. 2).

With the blessings of many, the Faculty of Education commenced its activities under the able leadership of Prof. Chandra Gunawardena who served as the founding Dean from 2003 to 2006. Originally, there were only two Departments of Study at the Faculty of Education, i.e., the Department of Education headed by Dr. Vinithamali Wickramaratne, and the Department of Early Childhood Education headed by Dr. Wimala Palihakkara. By 2004, a third department was established as the Department of Special Needs Education (SNE) headed by Mr. K.A.D.C. Oliver. This was also an important milestone since it was the first department in the Sri Lankan state university system in the field of SNE. Further, in 2004, the

names of the other two departments were changed: the Department of Education was renamed as the Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education (STE), and the Department of Early Childhood Education was renamed as the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE) (FoE Prospectus, 2004). The academic staff of the two initial departments of study, at the time of the establishment of the Faculty of Education in 2003, is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Academic staff of the Faculty of Education in 2003

(Source: FoE Prospectus, 2003, p.32)



Progression after becoming a Faculty

With the aim of fulfilling the expectations of the university, and the needs of the country, the Vision and the Mission statements of the Faculty of Education were set as follows (Faculty Prospectus, 2003, pp. 33-34):

The Vision:

To be a leader of the advancement of knowledge and professional practice in education as a fundamental human endeavor through open and distance learning in Sri Lanka and in the Region.

The Mission:

- To achieve excellence in research and scholarship in the field of education,
- To prepare professionals for service and leadership roles in education and related areas,
- To constructively inform educational policy makers and to critically appraise educational policy in Sri Lanka,
- To contribute to curriculum development in general and teacher education in particular, and
- To support society to identify and respond to its educational responsibilities and challenges.

In keeping with its Vision and Mission, the faculty continued to thrive, expanding, and extending its service in several ways, and making significant contributions to the field of teacher education in Sri Lanka.

At the time of the establishment of the Faculty of Education in 2003, the two existing departments were conducting six (6) study programs (CPE, ACPE, BEdNS, PGDE, MEd and MATE), and two new programs were being developed by the Department of ECPE (DECPE, BEdPE). During this period, the faculty consisted of only twenty-one (21) academic staff members catering to around 4,000 students (FoE Prospectus, 2003). The newly established Department of SNE initially started offering short courses related to special needs education and inclusive education, which were popular to a great extent. This department also developed a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Needs Education (PGDSNE) program, which has been offered to students since 2008.

The Department of STE restructured its PGDE program in 2004 and started offering it in all three languages—Sinhala, Tamil, and English (FoE Prospectus, 2005). Further, this department developed an innovative program—Master of Arts in Teacher Education International (MATE-I) in partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada, during 2003-2005. This program was inaugurated on February 1, 2005, with a group of 14 Sri Lankan teacher educators as its first cohort of students, who completed the degree program in English (OUSL Annual Report, 2005). Another novel program titled Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) was developed by the Department of STE, to familiarize university academics with distance education principles and techniques, which was offered from the year 2007 onwards (FoE Prospectus, 2008). A noteworthy achievement in the history of the faculty was the conferment of two PhD degrees in the field of Education for the first time at the 2004 OUSL General Convocation (FoE Prospectus, 2005).

Even amidst various challenges, the progress of the faculty during its first few years has been quite productive and very promising, as reflected through the following quote of the founding Dean, in 2006:

I believe that the Faculty of Education has successfully managed the first few faltering footsteps in its path towards the achievement of its goals, and I firmly believe that entry and contribution of young staff would re-energize and reinvigorate the faculty to enable it to set even higher goals in the future. - *Prof. G.I.C. Gunawardena, Dean/Education (FoE Prospectus, 2006, p. iv).*

Moving to a new building of its own in January 2009 (Figure 5) is a significant milestone in the history of the Faculty of Education (FoE Prospectus, 2010). With the continuous expansion of the faculty in terms of departments, study programs, courses, students, and staff, more space, infrastructure, and resources were needed. Getting a separate faculty building with the funds of the Asian Development Bank Distance Education Modernization Project (ABD-DEMP) helped address these requirements to a considerable extent although with certain persisting challenges. Nevertheless, the faculty ventured forward, confidently, and progressively.

Figure 5

New building of the Faculty of Education in 2009



In 2012, the Department of SNE commenced the Bachelor of Education Honors in Special Needs Education (BEsSNE). The goal of this program was to develop students' professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes in all aspects related to special needs education. It allowed interested individuals with any higher diploma (Levels 3 and 4) of OUSL or equivalent qualifications to study at Levels 5 and 6 and obtain the degree of BEsSNE while developing their competencies in the field of SNE (FoE Prospectus, 2013). Since 2020, the Department of SNE has also been conducting a Master of Education in Special Needs Education (MEsSNE) program of two-year duration which includes a research dissertation. It provides an

opportunity for postgraduate studies in SNE and inclusive education, and promotes research in SNE (FoE Prospectus, 2021).

The Bachelor of Education Honors in Drama & Theatre (BEEdT) program, developed in collaboration with the Drama and Theatre School of the Tower Hall Theatre Foundation (THTF), is another unique program initiated by the Department of STE. This program provides the opportunity for students who successfully complete the two-year Higher Diploma in Drama and Theatre at THTF to pursue a bachelor's degree from OUSL specializing in drama and theatre education (FoE Prospectus, 2012). This program is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka, and the first program at OUSL to adopt the 'credit transfer' system. The BEEdT program commenced in 2012 with 40 students (as stipulated by UGC) and continues to produce professionally qualified teachers of Drama and Theatre for the national school system.

In 2013, when the faculty celebrated its 10th anniversary, it was catering to 4,525 students newly enrolled in twelve (12) study programs and four (4) short courses offered by its three departments (OUSL Annual Report, 2013). By 2018, when the faculty celebrated its 15th anniversary, it was catering to 6,690 students (new enrollments only) throughout Sri Lanka (OUSL Annual Report, 2018). When considering the number of students including those who were still continuing from the previous academic year, the actual number of students within one year was much higher. This was quite challenging due to the small number of permanent academic staff members of the faculty—thirty-three (33) in 2013 and thirty-nine (39) in 2018 (FoE Prospectus 2013; 2018), while several of them were on study leave as well.

In 2019, the long-awaited Bachelor of Education Honors in Primary Education (BEdPE) program was launched by the Department of ECPE. Although this program was in high demand, due to the limited staff and resources available, only 957 students were initially enrolled based on a selection test (OUSL Annual Report, 2019). The number of enrollments has progressively increased in the following years. This degree program paved the way for students to climb yet another step on the 'ladder of opportunities' after completing their initial certificate and diploma levels at the Department of ECPE. Further, it has enabled them to obtain a recognized professional qualification and thereby secure teaching appointments in government schools.

During 2018-2020 several structural changes were done in the study programs, in compliance with the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) introduced by the UGC. Accordingly, all BEd programs were renamed as BEd Honors programs; the existing MEd Program with the research component was phased out and replaced with a one-year MEd of coursework at Level 9, and a new two-year Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program with a research component at Level 10; likewise, the MATE-I program was phased out and replaced with a Master of Teacher Education (MTE) program at Level 9 (FoE Prospectus 2019).

Another landmark in the history of the Faculty of Education was the establishment of its fourth department in 2020—the Department of Educational Leadership and Management (DELM), again a 'first' of its kind in the Sri Lankan state university system (FoE Prospectus 2021). The aim of

this department is to cater to the professional development needs of leaders in the education system such as principals, directors of education, and other personnel at various leadership and managerial levels. DELM initially offered short courses on school management, and educational leadership, yet at the same time developed a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (PGDELM), which received UGC approval in 2023.

Throughout its existence, the Faculty of Education has taken concerted measures to maintain the standards of its study programs, by adhering to quality assurance practices, and undergoing external quality review processes. For instance, the Department of Education was among the first departments to voluntarily subject itself to a pilot quality review process at OUSL (Raheem, 2010). In 2006, OUSL developed a 'Quality Assurance (QA) toolkit' comprising a QA framework specifically for ODL and a Manual of Self Evaluation for ODL Institutions, in collaboration with COL and the UGC (Coomaraswamy, 2013). The Faculty of Education engaged in a self-review of the Master of Arts in Teacher Education-International (MATE-I) program using this QA toolkit in 2007 (Karunanayaka, 2010).

Subsequently, the faculty and its departments were involved in the Institutional Review, Subject Review, and Program Review processes conducted by the Quality Assurance Council of the UGC. It was encouraging to receive very positive reviews for teacher education programs, such as receiving an 'A' grade for BEdDT and a 'B' grade for BEdNS in the program reviews conducted in 2019.

The high demand for the teacher education programs offered at OUSL is evident from the large number of applications received each year,

especially for PGDE, MEd, and BEdPE programs. However, due to the limited number of staff available in the departments, enrollment is done based on selection tests, limiting each cohort to manageable numbers in each program.

...When I joined the university in 2004...we registered nearly 1,000 odd students for PGDE, but now in year 2023, we are registering nearly 3,500 students for all three media. That is a very significant indicator about the demand for the PGDE...we are receiving a large number of applications...Last year, for the 2022/23 batch [intake], we received nearly 16,000 applications...There is a high demand for level 9 MEd (coursework) program too...we are receiving nearly 1,500 applications every year...but based on the selection test, we are selecting nearly 350 students...BEd (Honors) in Primary Education is also a program with a high demand. This year the department received nearly 9,000 applications... (IP2)

Since the commencement of OUSL, 36,253 graduate teachers have been given professional training through the PGDE program, and 14,242 pre-school teachers have been trained through the CPE and ACPE programs. Further, 562 teacher educators have received professional development through the MATE Program. The numbers of students who have been awarded their postgraduate diplomas, master's degrees, and certificates in some of the key study programs of the Faculty of Education during the period from 1981 to 2023 are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Number of students awarded PGDE, MATE, and CPE/ACPE (1981-2023)

(Source: Statistical Records, OUSL)

Year	Number of Awardees			
	PGDE	MATE	CPE	ACPE
1981-1990	4,579	-	1,654	-
1991-2000	6,576	-	2,870	308
2001-2010	8,116	231	3,584	784
2011-2023	17,194	331	4,239	803
Total	36,465	562	12,347	1,895

By the time the Faculty of Education celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023, it had strengthened with four Departments of Study comprising of 38 academic staff and offering twelve (12) study programs and six (6) short courses catering to above 9,000 students (FoE Prospectus, 2024).

Further, three study programs are being developed by DELM, while two new study programs are being developed for the proposed fifth Department of the Faculty—the Department of Learning Design, and Technology (DLDT), which awaits the UGC approval. Annexure 5 provides a list of key administrative officers of the Unit of Education, the departments, and the Faculty of Education during the period from 1981 to 2023, while Annexure 6 provides a list of study programs offered by the Unit of Education and the departments of the faculty during 1981-2023. They provide a bird’s eye view of the inspiring journey from a Unit of Education to a Faculty of Education and hence thriving as a faculty.

Research and Innovations

Research has always been an integral component of activities in the Departments and the Faculty of Education. However, the first few years after establishing OUSL have been a very challenging and hectic period for staff, who had to concentrate intensely on the development of course materials in the distance mode, and hence the research output has been limited due to the heavy workload.

... Of course, one thing got left out. Research work was out of the question. Because there was no time to do research with all the students. First decade we could not do anything in terms of research...It was a disadvantage for the academics... (IP1)

Identifying the crucial need to promote research related to distance education at OUSL, measures were taken to enhance DE research through the UK-funded ODA/DFiD project during 1996-1998. This initiative resulted in an increased number of DE studies, creating the Committee on Research Advice on Distance Education (CRADE), and launching a journal dedicated to DE research– “OUSL Journal”, that strengthened and motivated staff towards conducting DE research (Gunawardena, 1999; Raheem, 2010).

...by 1996, at the time that the collaborative venture with the Department of International Development (DFID), formerly known as the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) came into being, only a sparse number of research studies had been undertaken. Most of these were carried out by academics in the Department of Education for their post graduate degrees (Gunawardena, 1999, p. 2).

With the DFID project, staff of the Department of Education embraced the opportunity to engage in collaborative DE research studies, publish findings in the OUSL Journal, and present research papers in conferences. Meanwhile, several academics in the Department of Education had also completed their postgraduate research degrees (MPhil and PhD) in the fields of teacher education and distance education (e.g., Oliver, 1992; Lekamge, 1993; De Zoysa, 1994; Jayatilake, 1996). Further, quite a few staff members had completed their PGDE and/or MEd at OUSL in the ODL mode, before joining as academics. In addition, several senior academics with PhDs and extensive experience in teacher education joined the staff during that period. Hence, it was evident that, even prior to becoming a faculty, the two departments had academic staff with a strong sense of DE research in teacher education.

A remarkable event in the history of the Department of Education was the organization of an international workshop on “Distance Education Initiatives in Teacher Education in South Asia” (South Asia Federation for Distance Education Development – SAFDED) with a focus on primary and secondary school levels with the sponsorship of UNESCO, UNICEF, and COL. It was held from the 7th to the 10th of November 1995 at OUSL and attended by many international and local researchers. At this event, several academics of the Department of Education also presented research papers related to various study programs and areas of teacher education: PGDE (Gunawardena & De Zoysa, 1995; Lekamge, 1995; Wijeratne, 1995); BEd (Kudaligama & Goonetilake, 1995); and primary education (Palihakkara, 1995).

After its establishment as a faculty in February 2003, research culture within the Faculty of Education flourished to new heights. In the faculty, CPD workshops have been held for its academic staff members since 2004. In addition, staff were provided with opportunities both in Sri Lanka and overseas to gain exposure and experience and engage in research activities. They have regularly participated in local and international conferences such as the Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF), the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU), and the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), published widely in reputed peer-reviewed journals, and contributed to research activities in other institutions as well. The launch of the two faculty magazines—*Adeeksha* (in Sinhala) in 2010, and *Paarvai* (in Tamil) in 2011—encouraged staff members to develop their writing skills and support their students by way of sharing new knowledge in the two national languages (FoE Prospectus, 2011).

Since its inception, the faculty has conducted research seminars and workshops. The Faculty of Education, together with the Faculty of HSS, held the first Annual Academic Sessions at OUSL in July 2003, and also contributed in the OUSL Inaugural Annual Academic Sessions in November 2003 (FoE Prospectus, 2004). The first Anniversary Commemoration Research Seminar of the Faculty of Education was held in February 2004, enabling staff and postgraduate students to share their research findings (FoE Prospectus, 2005). These faculty research sessions continued as an annual event coinciding with the faculty anniversary, until the year 2015, when the university decided to conduct a single University-level Annual Academic Session, rather than individual faculty-level events. Nevertheless, throughout history, the faculty continued to engage in research and disseminate research findings in diverse ways.

Another significant event in the history of the Faculty of Education was organizing a seminar on Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education as the first event of the OUSL Silver Jubilee Celebrations, which were held in January 2005. Further, the Faculty contributed in organizing a COL- supported Workshop on Research Methodologies in Distance Education, which was held at OUSL in March 2005. Another noteworthy event was the Department of STE organizing a thematic seminar on "Making Teacher Education Interactive" under the aegis of the South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education and Development (SACTED) in May 2005 (FoE Prospectus, 2006).

The Faculty of Education has undertaken several national level initiatives and conducted research projects commissioned by entities such as the MoE, NIE, and the National Education Commission (NEC). For instance, during 2006-2007, upon the request of the MoE, the faculty implemented an Intensive Teacher Training Program for 1,000 newly recruited graduate teachers, contributing to a national need. The Department/Faculty has also taken the leadership in implementing collaborative international research projects supported by agencies such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), International Labor Organization (ILO), Save the Children Fund, World Bank, COL, and CEMCA.

...During the last four years the faculty continued offering quality programs aimed at improving professional competencies of preschool and schoolteachers, and teacher educators in the system. In spite of the various constraints, the faculty conducted two research studies under the generous support from ESDG project, World Bank, and two cycles of the three months' intensive training program in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (Dean's Message, Faculty Prospectus, 2008, p. ii).

The Child Rights Project implemented at OUSL in 1998 with financial support from the SIDA was initiated by the then Department of Education with the Faculty of HSS as an interdisciplinary project, to raise awareness and promote the concept of child rights. A key outcome of this project was an interdisciplinary body of knowledge on child rights in all three languages, under the title “Child Rights: Sri Lankan Experience” (See Goonesekere et al., 1998). Another major contribution of this project was introducing a course on child rights to several study programs offered by the Department of Education (OUSL Annual Report, 1999).

A Child Study Center was established in the Department of ECE in June 2000, with financial support received from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, UNICEF, and ‘Save the Children’ Norway. This was the only one of its kind in the South Asian Region. The objectives of establishing this center were to support quality assurance in all training programs related to ECE, staff development of personnel involved in child education, conduct research related to child development, and implement intervention programs for young children (OUSL Annual Report, 2001). The related studies conducted by staff have been published and shared at various forums.

...As a project assistant for the Child Study Center...I have done some research coordination...national and some inter-faculty research regarding the child development and...in relation to preschool education... (IP6)

Further in 2007, the Department of SNE established a Support Center for Children and Adolescents in Risk Situations (SCCARS) with the support of the German-Sri Lanka Friendship Foundation, to disseminate information, provide support services, and conduct short-term training courses in SNE (FoE Prospectus, 2007).

During 2003, efforts were made at internationalizing the MATE program of the Department of Education under the Chandrika Bandaranaika scholarship scheme, to be monitored by COL and GOSL, catering to the needs of teacher educators in the South Asian context (FoE Prospectus, 2003). A series of workshops held with international experts sponsored by COL during 2003-2004 resulted in the development of a novel practitioner-oriented program titled MATE-International (MATE-I) (Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2008). MATE-I is a unique program which is the first study program at OUSL to deviate from the conventional final examination procedure and adopt a continuous authentic assessment system (MATE-I Program Handbook, 2004). Even though internationalizing the program did not materialize due to practical issues, MATE-I received much recognition as an innovative program. It received the COL Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials (see Figure 6), presented at the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF5), held in London, July 2008, this being the “OUSL’s first international accolade” (Raheem, 2010, p. 40).

Figure 4

COL Award of Excellence for Distance Education Materials received for MATE-I in 2008



In addition to MATE-I (subsequently the name changed as MTE), several other study programs initiated by the departments/Faculty of Education have also been innovative and unique in different ways. For instance, the BEdNS was the first inter-faculty program developed at OUSL, while BEdDT was the first program at OUSL that adopted a course credit transfer system. Further, BEdNS, BEdDT, BEdPE, BEDSNE, and MEsSNE are the ‘first of its kind’ programs within the Sri Lankan university system. Another significant groundbreaking achievement of the faculty was the launch of the first fully online course at OUSL titled “Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist” in December 2007 (Karunanayaka, 2008). Much research has been conducted and published by the staff in relation to these courses and study programs.

Further, numerous research studies implemented at departmental and faculty levels have affected continuous quality improvement of specific aspects in various study programs. Some examples in relation to the PGDE program are as follows: Development of teacher competencies through the PGDE Program (Gunawardena et al., 2005); An action research study conducted on the quality improvement of the teaching practice component of the PGDE Program resulting in the introduction of a school-based mentoring system and a school-based project (Lekamge et al., 2014); Student teachers' perceptions on the continuous assessment methods of the PGDE program (Kugamoorthy et al., 2017); Improving Master Teacher's supervision of the teaching practice component in the PGDE program (Wanasinghe & Nawastheen, 2020).

Further, many studies related to the Master's degree programs have also been conducted. Some examples are as follows: Studies on the completion of the MEd Program, which identified issues faced by students in completing their research dissertation and adopted measures to minimize those issues (Lekamge & Karunanayaka, 2003; 2004; Perera et al., 2012; Wanasinghe et al, 2019); Evaluation of the MATE Program which identified its strengths and areas for improvement (Fernando & Jayasinghe, 2004; Ariyaratne et al, 2011); Exploring various aspects of the MATE-I program (Karunanayaka et al., 2005; Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2007; Karunanayaka & Thanaraj; 2020; Kugamoorthy et al., 2012).

Similarly, several research studies have also been conducted in relation to other study programs and areas of study including BEd programs, early childhood education, primary education, and special needs education: BEdNS (Kudaligama & Goonetilake; 1995; De Silva, 2020); BEdDT (Lekamge et al., 2017; Irugalbandara, 2021); BEdPE (Kumari et al., 2022); BEdSNE

(Ketheeswaran, 2022; Jayasinghe et al., 2023); CPE, ACPE and DECPE (Wijeratne, 1995; Seneviratne & Mukunthan, 2010; De Zoysa et al., 2011; Rajapakse, 2014; Ariyaratne et al., 2014; Rajapakse, 2015).

The conduct of such evaluative research studies by academic staff in relation to the teacher education programs implemented by the Departments and Faculty has affected constant quality improvement of the programs.

The Faculty of Education has been actively involved in various international collaborative activities since its inception. In November 2004, in collaboration with COL, it organized the inauguration of the SACTED in Colombo, where several teacher education specialists and academics from South Asian countries participated and discussed the formulation of strategies to improve the quality of teacher education. Academics of the faculty have also contributed to developing Quality Indicators for Teacher Education in a series of workshops organized by the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) of India and COL during 2004-2007, which resulted in producing a QA Toolkit for Teacher Education (Menon et al., 2007). There are many other instances of the faculty actively contributing to various innovative international initiatives such as developing a QA Toolkit for Distance Higher Education Institutions and Programs implemented by the UNESCO, COL, and the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka in 2009 (Kondapalli et al., 2009).

In recent years, the faculty implemented many other innovative projects with international collaborations. These include: Integration of ICT and OER into Teacher Education Programs (COL-supported project, 2013/2014); OER-based eLearning (CEMCA-supported project, 2014/2015); Integrating OER in Teacher Education Programs at OUSL (Research on Open Educational Resources for Development-ROER4D] (IDRC supported, 2015/2017); Continuing Professional

Development MOOCs on the Adoption of OER and OEP (CEMCA-supported project, 2017/2019); Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia (CONTESSA) (ERASMUS-EU co-funded project, 2018-2022); and Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) (a series of COL-supported projects, 2018-2023). Engagement in such innovative activities linked with research has immensely assisted in the capacity development and empowerment of staff as effective ODL practitioners, thereby improving the quality of teacher education programs. Further, these experiences have enabled the Faculty of Education at OUSL to gain recognition and appreciation as a leading entity in teacher education via ODL, as evident from the extensive research outputs disseminated and the numerous research awards received by the staff at university, national, and international levels.

4.2 Pedagogical Changes in Teacher Education Programs at OUSL

Examining the changes that have occurred in pedagogical approaches adopted in teacher education programs at OUSL, this section explores how ODL can foster innovative pedagogical practices in the professional development of educators.

Facilitating Learning at a Distance

Teaching and learning at a distance, in contrast to the conventional classroom-based face-to-face instruction, requires thoughtful consideration of the instructional methods used to bridge the distance between learners and teachers (Keegan, 1996; Moore, 1973). This profound change in the higher education system—from the well-known formal campus-based instruction in which teachers and students are physically present—creates emotional barriers to the acceptance of distance education (Perry, 1986). OUSL also encountered this challenge at its beginning in the 1980s.

...The age-old concept of the teacher as a guru and of students as acolytes who had to learn in the presence of the 'master' was now being challenged by a system which advocated that learning could take place through provision of structured course material...not by merely lecturing... (Raheem, 2010, pp. 9-10).

In DE, course materials replace the face-to-face instruction taking place in the conventional system. Hence the need to design course materials to act as efficient and effective tutors-in-print, in order to carry out all functions that a teacher would perform in the conventional situation (Rowntree, 1994). Designing self-instructional material for students who were learning at a distance was a challenge at the commencement of OUSL since "most educators who come into distance education come with backgrounds in conventional education" (Kotelawele & Samarasundara, 1987, p. 739). The design and development of user-friendly self- instructional DE modules for student teachers while adhering to the basic principles of education and theories of learning has been a quite challenging yet stimulating task for the academics in the Unit of Education in the 1980s.

During 1982-1983, the Unit of Education had taken a proactive initiative to introduce a 'competency-based approach' in developing instructional materials for the PGDE Program (FoE Prospectus, 2003). The first set of PGDE modules were written based on this novel approach although amidst various challenges.

We had a very limited staff...only four...and we had to write lessons so it was a very big challenge, because we had to do it immediately...We needed help from other outside visiting academics...but they were not very cooperative... they were not very convinced about... teacher

education through distance education...they had objections also on competency based education, our new syllabus, and said that they can't accept people who go through that syllabus and get the postgraduate diploma for their Master's degrees at conventional universities...then Ministry of Education also had reservations because they said if the other universities don't accept it as equivalent to the (existing) diploma they won't accept it for promotions...so, a lot of problems...in the meantime we had finished writing the books and it also went into print... (IP1)

Unfortunately, such reservations on this 'different' methodology adopted for teacher education resulted in abandoning the innovative competency- based curriculum of the PGDE program and reverting to the orthodox approach.

...Finally, our consultant said, well, with all these problems, go back to the old system. So, we had to give up the competency-based [approach] after writing lessons and printing also. We went back to the same system as the old one you know...educational psychology, philosophy, like separate subjects. Our competency-based [curriculum] was different you see, teachers evaluated teachers, like that... we started writing again...but we didn't allow the students to suffer...those who started on the competency-based [curriculum], they had their exams on that...and we didn't miss any batch...somehow or other we managed... after going back to the old system then we had full cooperation...and also, we were able to recruit visiting staff because they had gone through that system...they were familiar with that system... (IP1)

The above quotes clearly indicate the typical challenge of 'resistance to change' faced by faculty when attempting to introduce any changes to existing educational systems (Fullan, 2015).

Some early studies done by the staff of the Department of Education revealed that the students were reluctant and lacked confidence to engage in self-study as well and showed a more favorable attitude towards face-to-face teaching, expecting continuous help and guidance from the teachers (Wijeratne, 1988; Ismail, 1991). Hence, alternative instructional modes were introduced to supplement the distance learning in the form of academic tutoring and counselling where the tutors helped the students to learn from the self-study instructional materials.

...Another difficulty was they [the students] didn't have someone to consult...So we had a tutorial system. ...each lecturer had a number of students assigned and they met. because the students complained...they did not meet the staff for consultation ...So we had this tutorial system and that worked well. ... (IP1)

However, these methods were “not contradictory to distance learning but complementary.... a stepping stone to group learning, self-learning and also an early step of adapting to learning at a distance” (Ismail, 1991, p. 6). Moreover, the interpersonal dimension of teacher education in the distance mode, in terms of “the emergence of tutoring (by faculty and peers) in combination with the study of high-quality materials and teaching-while-learning” was identified as a successful strategy for professional development of in-service teachers at OUSL (Tatto & Kularatna, 1993, p. 756).

The ODA/DFiD Project conducted at OUSL during 1995-1998 has had a vast influence in strengthening the writing of self-instructional course material among academics, while streamlining the course development processes and initiating QA mechanisms (Jayatilleke & Kulasekara, 2020). Two manuals published by OUSL titled ‘Bridging the Gap’ (Kulatunga et al., 1995) and ‘House

Style' (Samarawickrama, 1996), provided specific guidelines and a template for course writers. The staff of the Department of Education, and later the Faculty of Education, adhered to these norms and guidelines on writing DE learning materials when developing self-study modules related to their study programs.

Further, since teacher education is a professional field of practice, much attention was paid to the adoption of appropriate strategies to develop relevant competencies in the students. Simultaneously, studies conducted by the staff also informed the student needs (Gunawardena & De Zoysa, 1995; Gunawardena & Lekamge, 2000; Jayatilake, 1996; Kudaligama & Goonetilake, 1995; Lekamge, 1995; Wijeratne, 1995). Accordingly, the teacher education programs and courses were designed in such a way as to support the students to actively engage in the distance learning process through appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Practitioner-oriented pedagogical approaches

Due to the explicit need for practice of openness and flexibility in ODL content and processes, it has been argued that high-quality distance education will exploit pedagogies from various generations such as cognitive-behaviorist, social-constructivist, and connectivist approaches, as necessitated by the content, context, and learner expectations (Anderson & Dron, 2011). Over the years, the design of teacher education programs and courses at OUSL has been influenced by diverse pedagogical approaches, nevertheless with persistent emphasis on professional competency development of educators in their respective fields, through active engagement in the learning process. While adhering to the stipulated guidelines of program and course development at OUSL, the Faculty of Education has adopted pedagogies that enabled educators to apply theory to professional practice in their own contexts.

Some examples from selected study programs at different levels are discussed in this section.

PGDE, the oldest and the largest program at OUSL in terms of student numbers, has undergone many changes since its commencement. As mentioned before, in 1981, the initial modules were developed adopting a highly practitioner-oriented, competency-based pedagogical approach integrating professional subject disciplines. However, due to various impediments, these modules were re-developed as subject-wise materials. Nevertheless, the new materials were written in a user-friendly manner to suit distance learners, adhering to the OUSL 'House Style' guidelines. The original modules written by the staff were quite voluminous, containing detailed content specially to support students from remote areas, who would study in the Sinhala and Tamil languages, in which there is a dearth of reading materials in the relevant subject areas.

...I remember Professor (...) asking me, why do you want to write such long lessons? My answer was, well, they don't have anything else to read... information was not enough. That's why all these books were very big... Huge books... It served, because otherwise students wouldn't have had anything else to read... (IP1)

Initially, PGDE was implemented as a two-year program (as Part I and Part II), only in Sinhala and Tamil, comprising eight compulsory “courses” (subjects) including a teaching practicum. In 2000, a complete course revision of PGDE took place (FoE Prospectus, 2003), and, simultaneously, it was re-structured as a 15-month program comprising six compulsory courses, two optional courses to be selected out of four, and a compulsory teaching practicum. The course content was updated, and the quality of presentation was improved. The course materials were made smaller in size and were divided unit-wise. The content

included “sessions” (lessons) containing the key concepts on the focus of the session with practical examples, and plenty of learning activities linked to the students’ actual classroom teaching practice. Additional reading lists were also provided, and the relevant materials were made available in the OUSL libraries. Face- to-face contact sessions held in the form of day schools and tutorial classes supported students to clarify their doubts and engage in peer discussions. Thus, a more learner-centered, constructivist pedagogy was adopted to facilitate student learning.

...And this is kind of problem-based and practical learning, experiential learning. So based on their experience, they have to answer the assignments...Also, collaborative approach and reflective approach...our aim is to produce good teachers...I think these approaches must be used by all teachers....these are highly applicable and effective for them... (IP7).

An effective teacher education program does not only ensure the existence of coherence among the courses but also a strong integration of coursework and real-world professional practice, linking theory with practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Accordingly, all teacher professional development programs of the Faculty of Education (PGDE, PGDSNE, and all BEd programs) include teaching practice as a compulsory component. This is implemented in two stages: Stage I consists of ten weeks of supervised teaching practice in the students’ own schools under the guidance of a Master Teacher; Stage II consists of the final evaluation of their teaching practice in a selected school. Similarly, the CPE program includes a compulsory teaching practicum in a preschool, while the DECPE includes practical teaching in a primary school and/or a preschool as a compulsory component of its evaluation. These practical teaching components are closely linked with the theory courses. In addition, contact sessions are conducted to enrich hands-on skills such as

preparation of teaching aids (as evidenced in Program Brochures of CPE, DECPE, BEdNS, BEdDT, BEdSNE, PGDE, PGDSNE).

Despite the integration of a robust teaching practicum, concerns were raised on the adequacy of competency development of teachers via ODL. Thus, measures were taken to address these concerns and minimize the issues related to teacher competency development.

...So, for teacher competency development, I feel that you must have face to face sessions, and the teacher educator should work very closely with the teacher trainee... Mentoring is a special thing in [the] Open University [that] we adopted... Because we train the mentors [and] they work very closely with the teacher trainees, especially at stage one...It is a mentor and mentee relationship...identifying their strengths and limitations...and supporting them... it's a making of a teacher, so that mentor plays a very important role...(IP5)

An action research project conducted at the Faculty of Education in 2009 with a view to improving the quality of the teaching practice component in the PGDE program resulted in the introduction of two major changes— a mentoring mechanism, and a school-based project (Lekame et al., 2014). It was revealed that the appointment of school mentors during the teaching practice period helped the student teachers to significantly “improve their personality characteristics and professional skills” (p. 110). Further, implementing small-scale school-based projects, under the guidance and support provided by the mentors, improved student teachers’ “participation in co-curricular activities” (p. 111), developing diverse skills including problem-solving in their own school settings (p. 115). Moreover, with the intention of promoting reflective professional practice, student teachers are required to maintain a reflective journal in conducting their school-based project and classroom-based teaching practice.

The mentoring mechanism, and the school-based project were integrated into the teaching practice course of the PGDE program since the academic year 2009/2010 and are successful in practice to date.

Continuous assessment (CA) plays a major role in the study programs of OUSL, which allows ongoing evaluation of students' learning throughout a course and contributes to their final evaluation as well. The teacher education programs of the Faculty of Education have adopted various types of CA that have been constantly improved based on research. For instance, due to numerous issues and limitations identified in relation to the practice of written take-home assignments (THA) in the PGDE program (Lekamge & Jayatilake, 2002), a novel CA mechanism was introduced in 2009, which was termed "Activity-Based Assignments" (ABA). Students must complete an ABA for each course at a day school, engaging in collaborative peer group activities and making oral presentations, while their performance is evaluated both individually and as a group (Perera, 2013). ABA day schools were found to be highly practice-oriented, motivating, and useful to both staff and students (Lekamge et al., 2014; 2015), and this type of CA is practiced to date. Subsequently, another assessment strategy was introduced to the PGDE Program in 2015: Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs), which were also perceived as useful by the students (Kugamoorthy et al., 2017). Using a combination of CA mechanisms comprising of THA, ABA, and CAT in each course provides a variety in the formative assessment strategies that support student learning in all teacher education programs of the faculty.

Diverse teaching, learning, and assessment strategies that link theory with practice are used in the teacher education programs at OUSL. For instance, BEdSNE and PGDSNE programs include an action research project in which students are required to plan, implement, and evaluate an intervention to address a special educational need of a child or group of children in their school

during their teaching practice period. Use of such strategies in these programs has supported the development of the necessary competencies in teachers, which makes them confident in catering for children with special education needs in their classrooms (Dhanapala et al., 2018; Ketheeswaran, 2022). Similarly, the BEdDT program also includes a course on an action research project which is implemented parallel to their teaching practice. Prior to engaging in their teaching practicum and the research project, a series of 'orientation workshops' and 'professional skills development workshops' are conducted for the students. These workshops are designed to "provide opportunities for experimentation and to stimulate positive expectations for these pre-service teachers" and "to prepare students for real classroom experience before they embark on teaching in real classroom" (Irugalbandara, 2021, p. 12). Adopting such diverse strategies to actively engage students in the learning process supports enhancing their critical thinking, creative thinking, and self-regulated learning skills.

Meaningful Learning Experience Design to Promote Authentic Learning

Designing meaningful learning experiences linked to real-life professional practice is a critical requirement in teacher education programs. As argued in the situated cognition theoretical approach, meaningful learning will only take place if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used (Brown et al., 1989), which is particularly applicable in the professional development process of educators. Thus, learning experiences should consist of authentic tasks targeting the development of competencies necessary for solving real-life challenges.

Adopting diverse strategies to promote authentic learning is an important requirement addressed in the professional development programs of the Faculty of Education. MATE-I (later renamed as MTE) is an exemplary program that is entirely designed using a pedagogical approach grounded on situated learning principles and promoting authentic learning (MATE-I Program Handbook, 2004). The next couple of pages will briefly discuss the key features of this pedagogical approach, and how it has supported capacity building for both students and staff.

MATE-I is a professional development program for in-service teacher educators designed and developed by the Faculty of Education during 2003-2005. This was the first study program at OUSL to deviate from the traditional content-driven, examination-oriented mode, with a complete focus on learner competency-development through a context-driven approach. This program introduced a novel approach termed 'scenario-based learning' (SBL) into the OUSL pedagogical practice. In SBL

as adopted in the MATE-I Program, teacher educators are situated in authentic learning scenarios as in a storyline and face real-life challenges in the form of learning activities, that lead them to completing the compulsory assessment tasks. These tasks take the form of mini projects.

For the first time in the history of OUSL, the MATE-I program adopted a new course design model using 'Study Guides' instead of the familiar self-instructional modules. Instead of the content-driven self-study sessions, these study guides consisted of learning scenarios, learning activities, and assessment tasks constructively aligned with the intended learning outcomes, besides a detailed study schedule indicating the activities within the stipulated timeframe, and a resource pack that helped students to complete the required tasks (Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2008).

This novel approach to teaching and learning has posed challenges to both staff and students. For staff, creating learning scenarios, designing learning experiences, and facilitating the interactive sessions have been particularly demanding, whereas, for the students, time-management in completing the learning and assessment tasks was a major issue (Karunanayaka & Lekamge, 2005; Karunanayaka et al., 2007).

The development of the MATE (International) Program was a daunting challenge undertaken by the Department of Education of the OUSL. The most challenging task, perhaps, was to achieve the required paradigm shift in university academics from a transmission teaching- learning culture to a transactional culture where students' talents, competencies, experiences and potential are given due recognition

and the students are accepted as active in the teaching-learning process (Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2008, p. 5).

Despite these issues, both staff and students embraced SBL as a useful and effective pedagogical approach.

...This pedagogical change was making students develop higher order cognitive skills. I think scenario-based learning is better than the earlier sessions, where they just have to read and understand. The idea here is they have to involve actively...so I think this is more effective...this is authentic learning...so it is very practical...They [the students] told us that they learnt how to write the assignments, they improved their writing skills, thinking capacity, communication skills, and how to work with others...they developed collaborative skills too... (IP6)

Even though it was initially difficult for students to change from the conventional teacher-dependent passive roles that they were more comfortable with, eventually they gained more confidence. Through SBL, it has been possible to make “students take control of their learning and to stimulate them to be independent learners” (Karunanayaka & Lekamge, 2005, p. 43). Nevertheless, it was necessary to provide ample learner support by means of interactive contact sessions, adequate learning resources, and regular feedback. These aspects have been constantly improved, especially with the integration of technology.

Another noteworthy characteristic of the MATE-I program was the deviation from traditional subject-oriented course titles. The courses were named: Teacher Educator as a Teaching-Learning Specialist (instead

of Educational Psychology); Teacher Educator as a Curriculum Developer (instead of Curriculum Development); Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist (instead of Educational Technology); Teacher Educator as a Professional (instead of Teaching as a Profession); Teacher Educator as a Researcher (instead of Educational Research) and Teacher Educator as a Manager and Leader (instead of Educational Leadership and Management) (MATE-I Program Handbook, 2004). These course titles reflect the actual roles the learners must play during their learning process and as professionals, thus placing more attention on developing the relevant competencies rather than rote learning of subject content.

The impact of this innovative pedagogical approach on student learning as well as staff capacity development has been reported in several studies.

Here is a quote from a student in Karunanayaka & Naidu (2009, p. 129):
...The scenario-based approach to learning...made me feel that I had done something new and useful...In fact, the learning activities were directly related to my profession so that putting what I learned into immediate practice was immensely useful...

And here one from a staff member (from Karunanayaka, & Naidu, 2018, p. 98):
...Scenario-based style changed our mindset to think in a novel way and we were able to give opportunities for our students to experience more authentic learning environments...

Another significant component of the MATE-I program is the “Learning Portfolio” which was introduced for the first time in a study program at OUSL in 2004. The learning portfolio requires teacher educators to continuously reflect on their competency development and achievement of learning

outcomes stipulated in each course, while compiling evidence to support their reflective practice (MATE-I Program Handbook, 2004).

...especially through this learning portfolio, they [the students] engage in reflective practice...it is useful for these working adults to develop themselves...and they are self-evaluating themselves...this program allowed them to develop their higher order cognitive skills, and teacher educators actually, they are preparing teachers for [the] future...they also can think about how to conduct the teaching-learning process to enhance their student teachers' cognitive skills... (IP2)

Engaging teacher educators in a reflective learning process through learning portfolios aimed at the development of their higher order cognitive skills. Yet, studies revealed that students needed plenty of guidance and support to further enhance their higher order cognitive skills (Kugamoorthy et al., 2014). Subsequently, several measures were taken to further improve teacher educators' engagement in the learning portfolio development process and help them become reflective practitioners. From 2023, an e-portfolio development is in place to further facilitate teacher educators in maintaining their personal portfolios which can showcase their professional development.

The newly introduced SBL design in the MATE-I program inspired the adoption of this pedagogical design in several other instances too. For example, during the initiative titled 'Integration of ICT and OER into Teacher Education Programs and Capacity Building of Teacher Educators at OUSL' (2013-2014), all faculty engaged in course design using the SBL

approach in four selected courses in the MEd, PGDE, PGDSNE, BEdECPE programs. This exercise greatly impacted the capacity development of staff in adopting more 'learning-centered' and 'practitioner-oriented' pedagogical approaches in their course design, promoting authentic learning among students (Karunanayaka, & Naidu, 2014). Further, the first Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) developed at OUSL (initiated and implemented by the Faculty of Education in 2017) adopted the SBL pedagogical approach and created scenario-based videos as a novel feature (Karunanayaka, & Naidu, 2020).

In addition, the study guide model in course design has been adopted in the PGDE program since 2021, after a major course revision process. Instead of self-study modules, students are required to engage in many learning activities linked to the subject matter and their own practices in real-life situations.

...Recently we introduced the study guide model for [the] Postgraduate Diploma in Education program. That is also a significant milestone... That is a different kind of a pedagogical approach... We use authentic kind of assignments...then we ask students to reflect on their own teaching experience...When they are given opportunities to engage in authentic learning activities, then they organize their own teaching learning activities...and now they can use those authentic learning principles in their own teaching... (IP7)

Certain concerns have also been raised regarding the adoption of the study guide model in the PGDE program, since this model is different from the

previous model of self-study modules which provided students with subject matter content as 'sessions'.

...We introduced recently...the study guides in the PGDE program...in my point of view, it has negatively impacted on the students because continuously we have provided modules...So, this time they are not getting modules... I think that we can continue providing modules along with integrating OER... (IP8)

...Now our PGDE program, we changed to study guide mode...It seems that the [student] teachers are not liking it very much because a module is a set of content...So I think, in an ODL system, it's a big facilitation...if not, with these study guides, we want to provide recorded sessions...and we should be giving those things in different mediums, not only in English...We want to improve our practice further... (IP10)

However, even in the study guide course model, students are provided with ample learning resources provided in the supportive online learning environment, which is being regularly updated. The 'change' in the pedagogical model, which requires more responsibility on the part of the learner, seems to affect the student teachers who expect and are more familiar with 'transmission of knowledge' rather than 'constructing their own knowledge.' Several studies are being conducted by faculty to identify specific issues in this regard and explore measures to further support student learning.

Developing meaningful learning experiences in teacher education programs based on learning-centered pedagogical designs has been further augmented through the integration of technology.

4.3 Technology-integration Initiatives in Teacher Education

This section investigates the ways in which technology has been integrated into teacher education programs at OUSL over the years. It explores the experiences and impact of integrating audio, video, interactive multimedia, online/blended learning, and OER in teacher education programs at OUSL.

Audio-Video and Interactive Multimedia Integration

The use of a combination of media and technologies in ODL provides not only a means of effective distribution of teaching-learning materials to distance learners but also enables more interactive learning among students (Perraton, 2010). Even though print has been the main delivery medium at OUSL, the establishment of an Educational Technology (ET) Unit as far back as 1988 has immensely supported the course development process through the integration of multiple types of media (Jayatilleke & Kulasekara, 2020; Raheem, 2010).

From the early days, student learning in the study programs of the Department of Education has been supported with media, as depicted by the following quote from an academic staff member who had been a student in the PGDE program in the 1980s.

...Even the earlier teacher training programs used media developed by the British Council when we were students. We watched those films and they were very influential for me...Actually I developed myself by watching those things...how to write lesson notes and how to prepare it before going to the class...So, video integration was there from the very beginning...and also very influential... Education Department used those media to convey the message to students, how to be a good teacher, [and] how to develop your teaching practice skills and abilities... (IP4)

Further, challenges faced by the limited academic staff of the (then) Department of Education visiting OUSL Regional Centers to conduct face-to-face sessions for students were, to some extent, managed by using video-recordings of the day school sessions conducted in Colombo.

... Some of my [day school] sessions were video recorded and played in Kandy [Regional Center] ... because we couldn't go to all the places. As it was just a few people...OU had this ET Division right from the beginning. So, they did the recording and sent to the Centers.... (IP1)

Subsequently, academic staff have been provided with opportunities to get training in video production and were able to develop videos relevant to the subject matter that they teach.

...When I joined in 1988, experts from Rupavahini came and trained us on how to develop lessons using media. And for more than one month we went to Rupavahini and observed how programs are being developed...and after that only I developed one or two videos, after

getting that training... We developed videos such as “how to use the blackboard” ... (IP4)

In the 1990s, the Department of Education was also involved in live radio programs.

A series of very popular radio broadcasts were also produced in [the] 1990s by the Department of Education on early childhood development. This 5-minute program was broadcast live in the morning on National Radio Broadcast Service to discuss “how to nurture your child”. However, this was not sustained due to the difficulty in finding sponsorships (Jayatilleke & Kulasekara, 2020, p. 317).

When the ET Division was improved to a fully equipped state-of-the-art Media House with the support of the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) in 1993, production of audiovisual materials was further enhanced to cater to the learning needs of the increasing student population (Raheem, 2010). With the facilitation of Media House, later re-named as the Center for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe), the staff constantly engaged in audio-video productions to support student learning.

...Now we are developing videos related to each session. We identify the key concepts of the courses to explain the theory and put into practice...We thought it is good to develop videos and integrate through the online courses...Now the four departments are working with the CETMe to develop videos... (IP2).

...I think in the ODL system--mostly in special needs education--we can include assistive technology in our teaching-learning process, that is very important...I also developed two courses, Emerging Trends in Special Education, and Inclusive Education. So, we included a lot of online materials, multimedia, videos...[A] lot of software [is] there for alternative communication systems...[and] we introduce all these things to the teachers...In the ODL system, practical exposure is limited. So, we can give that exposure by using videos... (IP3)

In addition to audio and video materials, integration of interactive multimedia (IMM) was introduced to OUSL in 2001 after a capacity building workshop conducted by CEMCA on Developing Multimedia Courseware for Distance Education. The Faculty of Education was among the first few faculties to develop and integrate IMM into their courses. For instance, IMM was successfully integrated into the course "Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist" in the MATE-I program in which the students (teacher educators) engaged in IMM development using Macromedia Director MX™ software (Karunanayaka & Ariyaratne, 2011). Further, using the same software, a set of IMM was developed as supplementary materials for the short course on Multigrade Teaching as a productive effort (Karunanayaka, 2011), which also received the best multimedia production award from OUSL in 2011.

...The other important thing is the development of multimedia...We developed some CDs for multigrade teaching. That was a very good approach because, [by incorporating multimedia], you can convey a lot of messages to the students...When we are explaining, sometimes some students can't absorb. When we are giving a CD,

they can watch it several times, and it's interesting too...(IP3)

Developing IMM using Macromedia Director MX™ was discontinued after some time due to various challenges such as heavy time consumption, and intense technical skill development required to use this multimedia authoring software. Nevertheless, technology-enhanced learning (TEL) material design and development by educators continues to be practiced in the following courses: "Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist" in the MATE-I (MTE) program, and "Computer Technology in Education" in the MEd program, integrating various open access and freely available digital tools. Such technology-driven interventions have immensely supported the capacity building of educators in merging content, pedagogy, and technology as designers and developers of TEL materials (Karunanayaka, 2023).

Paying attention to both pedagogy and technology is crucial in the course design of teacher education programs, especially in ODL.

...I see pedagogy and technology as two sides of the same coin. You can't say pedagogy is more important than technology or technology is more important than pedagogy. I think it is not the right argument. Pedagogy is important. Technology is also important...Modern technology is useless if you don't use the pedagogical aspects. So, we must have a balance between the pedagogy and technology...If you want a good teacher population, they must be very strong in technology and also, they should not forget about the pedagogical aspects... (IP5)

MATE-I is an outstanding example of a study program which demonstrates effective integration of subject matter content, innovative pedagogy, and novel technology.

The program effectively used mixed mode delivery where print, face-to-face contact sessions, electronic communication and additional online and multimedia resources are integrated. Print media was selected as the main technology as it is the most accessible form to be used by students, in all parts of the country. A complete instructional package included a Program Handbook, Study Guide and Resource Pack containing the Essential and Additional Readings and multimedia (Karunanayaka & Gunawardena, 2008, p. 2).

These instructional packages were provided to the students originally as hard copies (Figure 7), but later as soft copies through the online mode.

Figure 7

The Original Study Pack of the MATE-I program (in 2004)



Moving from a single correspondence mode based on print, audio, and video technologies, to interactive multimedia, and then to the online learning mode is indicative of the progressive developments of technology integration in the teacher education courses of the Faculty of Education.

Online and Blended Learning

In 2003, a capacity development workshop on e-learning, organized by CEMCA in partnership with the Staff Development Center, introduced

online teaching and learning to OUSL (Jayatilleke & Kulasekara, 2020; Karunanayaka, 2022). Following this workshop, the Faculty of Education was among the first few faculties to develop an online course at OUSL. This was for the course “Teacher Educator as an Educational Technologist” in the MATE-I program, initially created using the Manhattan Learning Management System (LMS) in 2003 and subsequently developed on the Moodle LMS as the first fully online (‘Online Plus’) stand-alone course implemented at OUSL in 2007 (Karunanayaka, 2007; Karunanayaka, 2008).

The ADB-DEMP implemented at OUSL from 2003 to 2009 had a notable influence on the modernization of the teaching-learning process at OUSL through expedited online course development and delivery. This was possible as a result of the staff capacity development ventures and the establishment of the National Online Distance Education Service (NODES) and NODES Access Centers (NACs) at several OUSL regional centers (Jayatilleke & Kulasekara, 2020; Raheem, 2010). These activities enhanced the quality of online teaching and learning in all faculties, including in the Faculty of Education.

...Now things are changing...There's no need to give printed modules, and we give mostly soft copies. And the cost is less when you give soft copies...[The] study guides are also given as soft copies, in the LMS, and everything is uploaded--student handbook [and] even assignments...So things have gone online...So, they [teachers] are developing these 21st century skills and their modern teaching... (IP5)

...Earlier the main learning material [was] the printed module, and the contact sessions helped to clarify the doubts. Now these days students

have more resources...All the courses have online support. So, there are many resources, quizzes, discussion forums, [and] reflective journals...So for a self-learner, these things will facilitate a lot... (IP10)

Over the years, online course design and development has gradually improved at the Faculty of Education, in line with the categorization of online courses adopted at OUSL as Supplemental, Blended, and Online Plus, based on their specified features in relation to access, use of technologies, interactions, types of activities, and online assessments (Jayasooriya et al., 2008). The first online plus stand-alone course developed by the Faculty of Education was discontinued after a few years since student numbers declined, mainly due to issues pertaining to online accessibility and connectivity. Blended and supplemental online courses were found to be more flexible and practical in implementation. All seven courses of the MATE-I (MTE) program were developed as blended courses and are implemented thus to-date for students enrolled in all three languages.

Similarly, both the optional course “Computer Technology in Education” in the MEd Program, and the compulsory course “Educational Technology Foundations” in the PGDE Program are implemented as blended courses. All the other courses in the study programs offered by the faculty have either been developed or are being developed as supplemental courses. At present, almost 85% of the total courses in the Faculty of Education have been developed as online courses (Faculty Board Reporting, January 2024).

The design, development, and implementation of blended online courses is quite challenging since these entail compulsory learning activities and assessment tasks which contribute to at least 20% of the overall assessment mark (Jayasooriya et al., 2008).

For instance, the blended courses mentioned earlier include various online activities such as quizzes, discussion fora, and reflective journals, which need to be assessed by the instructors. While this can be done without much difficulty in courses with manageable student numbers such as those in MEd or MTE, it is highly challenging in the case of courses with large student numbers (3,500+) such as those in the PGDE program.

Nevertheless, using alternative strategies such as automated feedback and peer assessment is being explored currently to manage the challenges, considering the importance of facilitating the relevant skill development of teachers and teacher educators, through online learning.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a sudden need to sustain the facilitation of student learning without disrupting the activities scheduled for the academic year. This was made possible thanks to the online learning support already in place on the Moodle LMS, and the adoption of other technologies. Supported by video-conferencing systems (such as Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet), and messaging applications (such as WhatsApp and Telegram), the academics kept in touch with the students, and all teacher education programs were implemented without any discontinuation of the scheduled activities. During this period, the Faculty of Education conducted the first Online Open Book Examination (for MEd) and the first Online Selection Test (for BEdPE) at OUSL (Karunanayaka, 2020). Even Teaching Practice (Stage 2) was conducted using videoconferencing.

...Now the year 2020, that's a very remarkable time during the COVID. We did fully online...that means applications, interviews, inauguration,

conducting day schools, presentations, everything we have done online because of the technology...During the COVID period we conducted teaching practice stage two...more than 12 students, I have done--that is via Zoom. Most of the students worked as a team during the COVID period, they helped each other [one another]. They also have and we also created WhatsApp groups, working together collaboratively, helping each other, and they exchanged resources too... (IP6)

...I can see a very clear positive impact because, after that COVID-19 period, their computer literacy has increased because we delivered online courses. I personally experienced [this] with MEd students. Earlier they were not aware of these things, they were very reluctant to use, afraid to use technology. But now they are able to type their assignments and they can upload their assignments and everything...Sometimes there are special needs students who follow MEd Special Needs Education program. They really appreciate this...Actually it has been impactful for them for their professional development... (IP7)

Integrating OER in online course development is another significant area that the Faculty of Education has been engaged in since 2012. The first OER-integrated online course, “OER for Science Education (OER4ScEd)” was developed and implemented in the 2012/2013 academic year by the Department of STE as a supplementary course for science teachers who were students of the PGDE and BEdNS programs. The main aim of creating this course was to introduce the concept of OER, and to promote the use, adaptation, creation, and sharing of OER by science teachers, and

it was perceived by the student teachers to be highly useful and relevant to their teaching (Karunanayaka et al., 2013; 2014).

The Faculty of Education has initiated and implemented CPD programs with OER and technology integration not only at the departmental and faculty levels but also at university, national, and international levels. Some examples are Integration of ICT and OER into Teacher Education Programs and Capacity Building of Teacher Educators at OUSL (OERTE Project- 2013/2014); adaptation, development and implementation of the OER-based e-Learning courses at OUSL (OEReL Project- 2014/2015); Integrating OER in Teacher Education Programs at OUSL (ROER4D Project- 2015/2017); design, development, implementation and evaluation of MOOCs for continuing professional development of educators on the adoption of OER and OEP (2017-2019); and C-DELTA Projects (2018-2023).

The OERTE Project enhanced capacity development of all Faculty of Education staff in OER-integrated online course design and development. It also resulted in the first OER book published by OUSL capturing the reflections of the staff which was titled “Integrating OER in Educational Practice: Practitioner Stories” (Karunanayaka & Naidu, 2014; See <https://ou.ac.lk/intergrating-oer-in-ep/>). The OEReL Project was implemented for staff of all Faculties and other relevant entities at OUSL. The ROER4D research project was quite significant since it was implemented with schoolteachers (student teachers of the PGDE program) who were drawn from all nine provinces of Sri Lanka. The impact of this intervention on changing teachers’ pedagogical perspectives and practices as reflected in their lived experiences was captured in the second OER book published by OUSL titled “Dreamweaving Open Educational Practices” (Karunanayaka & Naidu,

2016; See <https://ou.ac.lk/dreamweaving-oep/>). The following excerpts from student teachers' reflections demonstrate the strength of this impact:

...Earlier we used internet resources for our teaching-learning process without considering much about copyright laws...We identified the significance of using OER...Now we are confident to integrate OER in our teaching-learning process... (pp. 28-29)

...We were amazed to know that a lot of OER are available without any cost which can be used for teaching and learning easily. We understood that OER are helpful to improve access to learning opportunities by sharing knowledge and learning resources... (p. 115)

The C-DELTA projects were also initially implemented with three cohorts of secondary school teachers, who were students of the PGDE program, representing the nine provinces of Sri Lanka. These interventions have immensely supported the teachers to develop digital leadership skills, as well as promote digital education practices among students in their schools (Karunanayaka & Weerakoon, 2020). Since 2019, with the approval of the OUSL Senate and Council, C-DELTA is offered as a free, non-credit, self- study online course for all students registered in any of the study programs at OUSL (Karunanayaka et al., 2022).

The Faculty of Education was involved in the CONTESSA Project during 2018-2022, which was an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Commission led by the University of Graz, Austria. It aimed to develop a

collaborative teacher training program which would address the contemporary skill development needs of schoolteachers. The faculty contributed to the curriculum development together with the development of five modules on selected topics, which were later integrated into the BEdPE Program. With the support of the CONTESSA project, the Faculty of Education was able to establish the first “Smart Classroom” at OUSL in 2020, which is again a significant achievement (Perera & De Silva, 2023).

These novel experiences of technology-integrated initiatives have offered practitioners— both students and staff of the Faculty of Education— immense opportunities to engage in innovative practices, resulting in continuing capacity enhancement, and professional development.

4.4 Key Trends in the Development of Teacher Education Provided at OUSL via ODL

This section identifies the key trends in the design, development, and delivery of teacher education programs through the ODL mode at OUSL. It also highlights good practices to uphold, and future advances to enhance the quality of teacher education practices via ODL.

Trends in Teacher Education Practices

Analysis of data revealed several trends in the design, development, and delivery of teacher education programs and courses at the Faculty of Education, OUSL, which are summarized below.

The teacher education programs implemented by the (then) Department of Education, and the Faculty of Education have been very popular, and generally in great demand, from their inception. Due to the gradual increase in the student numbers of the various programs on an academic year basis, the overall student population of the faculty is quite visible. Expanding the outreach to OUSL regional centers and study centers in the case of most study programs has enabled large numbers of educators from all over Sri Lanka, especially from the remote areas, to fulfill their academic and professional development needs. Further, offering most of the study programs in all three languages—Sinhala, Tamil, and English—providing equal opportunities to all ethnic groups to study in their preferred languages is noteworthy.

Designing the study programs in such a way so that student progression is facilitated from the lowest levels (Certificate/Advanced Certificate) to the highest levels (MPhil/PhD) according to the SLQF levels, and in keeping with OUSL's concept of "the Ladder of Opportunities", has been a prominent measure gradually adopted by the faculty. Further, developing study programs with lateral entry and exit points, thereby allowing more flexibility and adaptability in providing learning opportunities to suit the specific needs and preferences of students, has also received increasingly more attention. In addition, developing study programs and short courses on a wide variety of subjects and specialized areas of study—such as early childhood education, primary education, special needs education, inclusive education, educational leadership and management, science education, drama and theatre education, child rights, and research methodology in education—catering to a variety of clientele in the field of education is another desirable tendency observed.

Expanding the clientele initially starting from preschool teachers and secondary school teachers to subsequently include primary school teachers, teacher educators, educational administrators, teachers of children with special educational needs and learning disabilities, prospective teachers of drama and theatre, and personnel interested in educational research is a significant trend.

Teacher education programs have progressively adopted innovative pedagogical approaches which are more learner-centered, and learning-centered. The teaching-learning processes in these study programs promote practitioner-oriented, contextualized, problem-based, inquiry-driven, and collaborative learning, emphasizing co-construction of knowledge by learners along with instructor facilitation, which is very much at variance with mere rote learning. This involves designing meaningful learning experiences incorporating authentic teaching, learning, and assessment linked to learners' real-life practices-with the aim of empowering student teachers and other educators to develop competencies in order to meaningfully apply theory into practice and solve real-world challenges.

All teacher education programs essentially include practice-oriented courses-in addition to theory-based courses. For instance, the teaching practice component is given a prominent emphasis in certificate courses, as well as diploma, and undergraduate study programs. In addition, almost all study programs consist of project-based courses. Integrating school-based projects, action research projects, and mini-projects into different teacher education programs helps the development of research skills among practitioners. Continuous improvements are being made and innovative mechanisms are being introduced to smoothen the

implementation of these practice-oriented courses, managing various challenges faced with large student numbers, and limited permanent staff to co-ordinate and facilitate them.

Another highly significant trend observed is adopting innovative assessment strategies. Deviating from traditional types of assessment, a variety of novel strategies such as scenario-based assessments, activity-based assignment day schools (ABAD), reflective journals, learning portfolios, and peer discussion forums have been introduced.

Incorporating such alternative and authentic assessments allows instructors to assess the development of higher order thinking skills in their students. Students, in turn, are also provided with opportunities to demonstrate the competencies they have developed during the learning process. Further, in several courses, assessment rubrics are increasingly being utilized as an effective means of guiding students in self-assessment and providing feedback.

Integration of technology in teaching, learning, and assessment has been the most prominent trend in all study programs and courses. Use of a multitude of technologies, progressing from print technology to audio-video technologies, interactive multimedia, and online technologies, to deliver the courses is an apparent development. Especially, increased online course design, development, and delivery has promoted blended learning practices among students. Integrating various online learning activities and assessment tasks implemented via Moodle LMS such as quizzes, discussion fora, and e-portfolios has supported students in improving their technological skills as well. These activities have also reinforced peer support, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, and the building of learning communities. An overall progression of technology-enhanced teaching and learning, merging

technology with content and pedagogy, is an exceptionally positive tendency identified. Technology integration has made the teaching-learning process more appealing, engaging, efficient, and effective, leading to enhanced student learning and competency development of practitioners.

Another pronounced trend in teacher education practices has been promoting the adoption of OER and OEP among staff and students of the Faculty of Education. Introducing the concept of OER, and integration of OER in course design and development has resulted in the development of various skills such as searching, identifying, and even creating OER materials in all three languages. Further, OER integration has also promulgated the practice of 'sharing' among educators thus promoting OEP.

Moreover, various strategies are continuously being utilized in the teaching-learning process to support self-directed and self-regulated learning among the distance learners. Integrating reflective learning is observed to promote critical reflective practice among students, which helps their continuous self-improvement as practitioners. The general tendency observed among students to be more teacher-dependent, and resistant to adopting novel practices, especially at the beginning of their learning process, is addressed by providing adequate learner support mechanisms from orientation up to graduation. Structured instructional support and meaningful interaction opportunities provided to them are constantly being improved.

Continuous professional development of the academic staff of the Faculty of Education is a critical requirement that has been continually addressed. Various capacity development initiatives implemented at the faculty, -

enable fostering innovative pedagogical and technological practices among the staff. Especially, provision of opportunities for staff involvement in collaborative research projects at departmental, faculty, institutional, national, and international levels has been immensely beneficial for staff capacity development in diverse aspects. Further, such innovative initiatives have paved the way for enhancing a research culture among the staff and global networking with experts in relevant subject areas.

With the increasing number of students in various study programs spread out in regional and study centers all over the country, the number of visiting staff including day school academics, assignment marking examiners, and master teachers who supervise the teaching practice component has also increased. Training workshops are constantly held for all these categories of visiting staff, considering their competency development as a key requirement. This ensures the creation and sustenance of a pool of visiting staff trained in providing teacher education services via ODL as a positive outcome.

Upholding Good Practices and Continuous Quality Enhancement

Good practices in teacher education adopted by the Faculty of Education that have been identified through the analysis of data are presented below in summary. Since many of these have already been discussed in the previous sections, these practices are only listed here along with some examples.

- (a) Promoting ODL practices within teacher education programs in cognizance with the requirements, trends, and developments in local and global contexts:
 - provision of various pathways for students to climb the “Ladder of Opportunities”
 - enhanced accessibility, flexibility, variety, and adaptability

- orienting new staff and students to the ODL philosophy and practices
- (b) Adopting innovative learning-centered pedagogical approaches in curriculum design that emphasize active engagement, knowledge construction, and self-regulated learning among students
- practitioner-oriented, authentic learning experience design (e.g., SBL)
 - novel models in course design (e.g., study guide model)
 - alternative teaching, learning, and assessment strategies (e.g., ABAD, e-portfolios)
- (c) Integration of novel technological developments such as audio-visual technologies, interactive multimedia, online and blended learning to support teaching and learning-
- blended and supplemental online course design, development, and delivery
 - producing audio, video, and IMM materials to support student learning
 - promoting digital learning practices among staff and students through various initiatives
 - providing opportunities for educators to function as designers of TEL materials
 - establishing a “Smart Classroom” at the faculty, and encouraging staff to use it for teaching and learning
 -

- (d) Integrating OER in online course development to promote sharing of teaching and learning materials, thus inspiring a culture of sharing among educators-
- implementing OER-related collaborative initiatives among staff and students
 - encouraging the staff to integrate OER in course development
 - promoting the creation, collation, and sharing of OER among staff and students
- (e) Devising appropriate learner support mechanisms to help students in proceeding with their teaching-learning process
- implementing a mentoring system to support students with their teaching practicum and school-based projects
 - conducting student counselling sessions and tutorial classes
 - maintaining regular interactions with students via WhatsApp groups and LMS
- (f) Establishment of different entities within the Faculty to support students, and study programmes, as well as to address societal needs
- Model Preschools that serve as "teaching laboratories" for trainee preschool teachers in the relevant study programmes of the Department of ECPE
 - The Child Study Center which supports conducting research related to ECPE in order to improve the quality of the programs conducted by the Department of ECPE
 - The Support Centre for Children and Adolescents at Risk Situations (SCCARS) of the Department of SNE which provides training workshops, short courses, and consultation to individuals as per their requirements

- The Research Center of the Department of STE, which serves as a mini-library for research students and staff of the faculty.

(g) Provision of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for faculty, enabling them to learn, unlearn, and relearn

- conducting regular Faculty CPD workshops to all academic staff, on important topics related to their professional practice
- enhancing staff capacity through engagement in international collaborative initiatives and research projects
- encouraging staff to publish in the two faculty magazines (in the two national languages—Sinhala and Tamil) to explore new areas of study within the discipline of education, develop their writing skills, and share new knowledge with students and the community
- encouraging staff to make academic presentations at the monthly Faculty Board meetings, and to organize/ and present at departmental/faculty webinars

(h) Implementing activities to inculcate a research culture within the faculty.

- conducting research studies at department level on relevant areas
- conducting Faculty Annual Academic Sessions to promote research dissemination among staff and students
- encouraging staff to disseminate research through publication in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and to present their research findings at conferences

(i) Implementing quality assurance activities through the Faculty QA cell, to maintain and improve the quality of course design, development, and delivery procedures

- obtaining student feedback, peer feedback, and peer reviews to improve processes
- conducting research studies related to teacher education programs and courses to identify areas for continuous improvement

(j) Identification of challenges leading to the devising of appropriate strategies to manage those challenges and promote resilience among educators and learners in the ODL system

These good practices need to be sustained, making continuous improvements according to the changing educational and societal needs.

The following quote from an interviewee concisely highlights the impact of the efforts taken by the Faculty of Education in contributing to teacher education via ODL over the years:

...Considering the significant developments that the faculty has made during the last two decades, towards fulfilling its declared mission, I am inclined to believe that it has made a continuous, concerted and a dedicated effort at fulfilling some of the most critical and demanding professional development needs of a wide range of personnel involved in our educational system in the country. Its efforts are incomparable in terms of their scope, quality, and outreach. I foresee a future of continuing development of what it does and a greater appeal for what it offers... (IP14)

A noteworthy feature of all initiatives discussed in the previous sections is their focus on researching to identify areas for improvements and evaluating the impact of integration of novel strategies on student learning, and staff capacity enhancement. There is a vast number of research studies conducted by the staff, in relation to various aspects of the teacher education study programs, courses, and initiatives conducted by the Faculty of Education, and many articles are published in peer-reviewed journals, edited books, and conference proceedings. These artefacts have been collated, categorized, and included on the website created as a significant output of the current project– “TEDODL@OUSL” <
<https://tedodlousl.wordpress.com/>>

5

Concluding Remarks and The Way Forward:***The Journey Continues!***

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study, discusses some of the implications of the key findings of the study, and offers recommendations for further improvements in the design, development, delivery, and evaluation of teacher education programs conducted via ODL at OUSL, and in similar contexts.

5.1 Conclusions of the Study

The objectives of the overall study were to: identify the key trends in the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL; examine how pedagogies in teacher education programs have changed over time; examine how technology has impacted on teacher education over time; identify good practices and areas for future developments in teacher education; create and publish a website as an open access e-resource compiling related artefacts; and create and publish a narrative account of the study as a research monograph. All these objectives were achieved by the end of the investigation.

The key trends indicate that the implementation of teacher education via ODL at OUSL has gradually progressed providing a wide variety of learning opportunities to suit the specific needs of the clientele, in keeping with the “Ladder of Opportunities” framework. Learning-centred pedagogies have been progressively used in the teacher education programs adopting more practitioner-oriented approaches to promote authentic, inquiry-driven, collaborative, self-regulated,

and reflective learning among the learners, supported with the integration of emerging technologies.

Several good practices are in place to ensure effective learner support and enhance quality in the study programs. Nevertheless, continuous improvement of the processes through reflection, review, and research is essential. During the current study, a collection of research articles on teacher education via ODL at OUSL and other relevant articles were organized, and openly published on a website. Further, publishing this monograph as a narrative account of the study is the ultimate achievement. Both these– the website and the monograph, will serve as open access e-resources for any educator, practitioner, or researcher in the field of Education, specifically in teacher education.

5.2 Implications of Key Findings

A transformational journey in teacher education through ODL involves a series of significant shifts, advancements, and adaptations. With its vision ‘to be a leader of the advancement of knowledge and professional practice in education as a fundamental endeavor through Open and Distance Learning in Sri Lanka and in the Region’, the Faculty of Education at OUSL has embarked on this challenging journey with determination. It has built upon the strong foundations laid by dedicated individuals from its humble beginnings as a ‘Unit of Education’ and later, a ‘Department of Education’ since the 1980s. Inspirational and committed leadership of those who assumed roles in the faculty academic administration, the unwavering support of all the staff, and the collaborative teamwork among all departments functioning as ‘one family’ at the Faculty of Education have immensely contributed to its significant successes, despite numerous challenges encountered during its evolution.

Over four decades, progressive steps have been taken in pursuance of the faculty's mission: to achieve excellence in research and scholarship in the field of education; to prepare professionals for service and leadership roles in education; to constructively inform educational policymakers and to critically appraise educational policy in Sri Lanka; to contribute to curriculum development in general and teacher education in particular, and to support society to identify and respond to its educational responsibilities and challenges. The key findings of this study focusing on the trends, good practices, and impacts provide ample testimony on the concerted efforts made by the faculty to accomplish these objectives. As a responsible educational entity dedicated to teacher education and professional development of personnel in the field of education, the Faculty of Education steadily moves forward to achieving the targets stipulated in its mission statement.

Transformative changes in teacher education are driven by shifts in educational paradigms, technological advancements, and pedagogical innovations. As revealed through the findings of the study, teacher education programs implemented at OUSL through ODL have evolved to embrace practitioner-oriented and competency-based pedagogical approaches, and emerging technologies. Facilitating practitioners to change their conventional thinking and professional practices in line with the shifting paradigms of education is vital in the contemporary educational landscape, which is being addressed by adopting technology-mediated innovative pedagogies in course design. Meaningful learning experience design provides adequate opportunities for educators not just to access and accumulate knowledge, but to explore, experience, and utilize the acquired knowledge in real-life situations.

Engaging in meaningful learning with technology will support the

development of higher order cognitive skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaborative skills of learners, and empower them to function as productive educators, and ‘agents of educational change’ in the 21st century.

Various strategies have been explored and adopted by the faculty to address the challenges and concerns of the teaching-learning process in the ODL mode. These include creating operative learner support systems embedded within the study programs, as well as providing continuing professional development opportunities for instructors. While taking such supportive measures, it is also imperative to ensure that the academic rigor of the teacher education programs conducted through the ODL mode is maintained.

The ODL system offers profuse opportunities for pedagogical innovation. Current trends in teacher education practices via ODL signify increased accessibility, flexibility, and adaptability in providing opportunities to meet the diverse needs of educators in various contexts. They emphasize the potential of innovative pedagogies and emerging technologies to prepare educators to face the complex demands of the contemporary education system, and the changing nature of knowledge required in the digital age. Constant adaptability and responsiveness to emerging needs will continue to shape the future of teacher education provided via ODL. In ODL contexts, exploring the potential of novel technologies, innovative pedagogies and methods of exploiting their affordances to effectively design ODL programs for professional development of practitioners is essential. It is expected that ongoing research will guide this transformative journey to ensure that teacher education remains responsive to the evolving needs of learners in the ODL system.

5.3 Recommendations for the Future

Prospects for teacher education provided through ODL are dynamic, evolving, and shaped by technological advancements, and societal changes. Based on the findings of the study, and in light of the literature, the following recommendations are made to further develop teacher education practices via ODL at OUSL, and in similar contexts in the future.

- (a) Teacher education courses need to be designed on solid theoretical grounds.
 - The design of learning experiences in teacher education programs conducted via ODL should be meaningful and contextual, and based on strong theoretical views on teaching and learning, to support the development of critical competencies of the learners, who are serving as or planning to become practitioners in the education system.

- (b) Learning environments should have an appropriate blend of content, pedagogy, and technology.
 - Learning environments provided to the learners of teacher education programs will be effective only if they contain an appropriate blend of subject matter content, pedagogical approaches, and technology integration within the learning experience design (Koehler et al., 2016). Adoption of innovative pedagogies augmented with novel technologies (e.g., flipped learning, gamification, microlearning, etc.) in the teaching-learning process will empower educators (Kukulka-Hulme et al., 2023).

- (c) Design of multimodal learning environments integrating novel technologies is desirable.
 - Technology-enabled multimodal learning environments created with multiple representations of content via text, images, audio, video, and animations (Moreno & Mayer, 2007) will support - student learning in ODL by catering to their diverse learning needs, providing multilingual options for non-native speakers of English, and bringing in assistive technologies for students with special educational needs. Student teachers/educators can also be involved in creating such learning environments, developing their competencies as well.

- (d) Using blended, hybrid, or HyFlex modes of learning as appropriate, - will provide alternative pathways for all learners to participate in the learning process.
 - HyFlex (hybrid-flexible) courses offer alternative participation modes accessible to all learners (Beatty, 2019). In addition, providing diverse learning activities and resources with flexible options including in-person, synchronously online, asynchronously online, and other low-tech alternatives will allow learners to have choices of participation in the learning process, depending on their contextual conditions.

- (e) Emerging technologies should be explored and integrated into the teacher education programs.
 - Both teachers and learners involved in the teacher education programs should be encouraged to collaboratively explore how the emergent technologies could be meaningfully, productively, and ethically integrated into educational practices. (e.g., artificial intelligence, learning analytics, gamification, blockchain-based micro-credentialing, etc.)

- (f) Promoting the building of professional learning networks (PLN) among practitioners will be useful to support their continuous professional development.
- Linking technology-enabled interactions and collaborations to the teacher education courses through digital media will encourage professional networking among the practitioners (both staff and students). This, in turn, will lead to the development of professional learning communities (PLC).
- (g) Integration of OER and OEP in teacher education programs will enhance creativity and “openness” among educators.
- Encouraging staff and student teachers to adopt OER and OEP will enable the development of several skills among educators (e.g., searching, identifying, integrating, curating, creating, and sharing OER). Furthermore, it will also bring about attitudinal changes in them, promoting the concepts of “openness” and “sharing” and lead to the fostering of a shared culture among teachers and learners.
- (h) Teacher Education programs and courses should be regularly reviewed and evaluated to sustain their academic rigor.
- Staff should be encouraged to undertake evaluation research studies in relation to teacher education programs/courses with a view to identifying their strengths and areas for improvement, and to affect quality enhancement.
- (i) Action research (AR) and design-based research (DBR) initiatives should be promoted among practitioners.
- Both AR and DBR are effective research approaches to adopt in

teacher education, as these involve designing and implementing interventions in real-life situations to improve educational practices (Kemmis, 2019; Reeves, 2006). Implementing carefully designed, contextualized, and process-oriented interventions can create positive changes in professional thinking and practices among practitioners in the field of education.

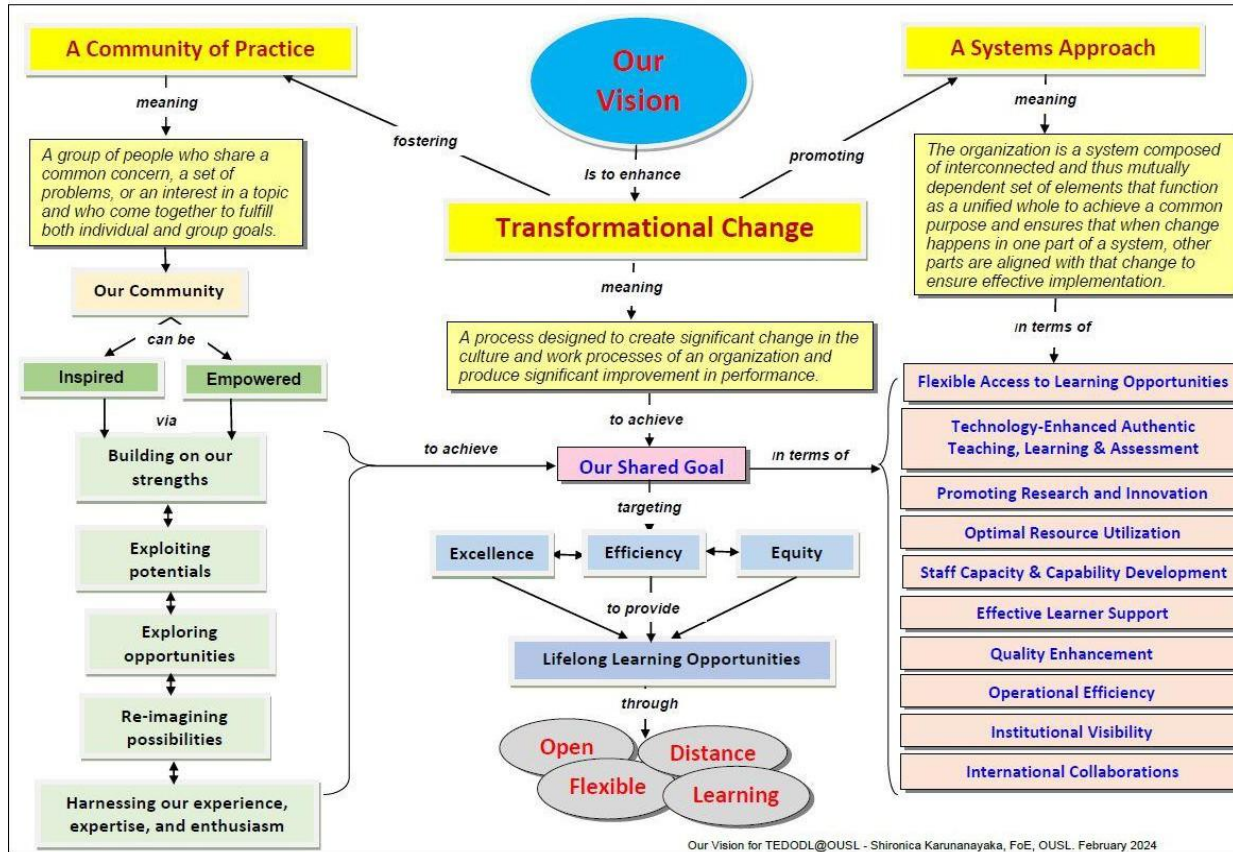
- (j) A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach should be adopted in the teaching-learning processes.
 - UDL uses a variety of teaching methods, flexible learning activities and adaptable learning materials catering to individual and contextual needs, thus minimizing barriers, and helping all learners (CAST, 2024). This would be an appropriate approach to adopt in teacher education programs conducted via ODL, which is achievable with careful planning, creative designing, and appropriate decision-making.

In conclusion, our endeavor is to enhance transformational change in teacher education via ODL at OUSL. This can be achieved by fostering a 'Community of Practice' (Wenger, 1998) to achieve our shared goal towards excellence, efficiency, and equity in offering lifelong learning opportunities for teachers, teacher educators, and other personnel in the field of education through open, flexible, and distance learning methods, and by adopting a systems approach to planning and development, as depicted by the concept map illustrated in Figure 8.

Our journey continues towards a transformational change in teacher education via ODL at OUSL!

Figure 8

A Concept map on Our Vision for Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL





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Commentary: G.D. Lekamge

Teacher Education through ODL at OUSL: A Reflection

My reflections go back to the year 1986 when I was able to get an appointment as an Assistant Lecturer to the Unit of Education of OUSL's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The limited number of staff members in the Unit were struggling to overcome the challenges emerging from the new brand of the Open University while competing with the other higher education institutions to attract staff as well as students. There was no clear idea among staff about the ODL approach embraced by OUSL. A huge emphasis was placed on the development of high-quality self-study instructional material as the main supportive mechanism for students. The two teacher education programs namely the Post Graduate Diploma in Education and Certificate in Preschool Education were popular among the target groups as they provided opportunities for teachers to obtain professional training while they remain in their schools. However, in the initial stages, the provision of open and flexible access to those programs to any teacher or prospective teacher, at any place in the country and at any possible time was a far-reaching goal for the newly established Department of Education.

OUSL had moved gradually to fulfil the goals of its mission through the application of systematic procedures, the expansion of resources and regional network, the support of energetic leadership and dedicated staff along with international collaborations. The Department of Education and later the Faculty of Education played a leading role in creating this

revolutionary change. By now, the Faculty of Education offers ladders of opportunities for teachers to start their professional journey with minimum qualifications and provides multiple entry points with some exists at some crucial points of the programs. In addition, short courses and training workshops are conducted to fulfil the specific needs of teachers. All the teacher education programs are offered in all three media in the majority of regional, study and teaching centers. I am very happy to note that through various timely interventions and meaningful interactions, a huge pool of vising academics has been trained as day-school academics and assignment marking examiners. Having introduced the school mentoring program and strengthened the quality of Master Teachers the Faculty was able to provide a satisfactory answer for the question raised by Kotalawela (1993) “whether distance education programs are capable in transferring the skills and attitudes that are required by teachers in the school system?”

The introduction of the Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) Approach to the MATE Program can be considered as a significant milestone in the history of the Faculty of Education where authentic learning scenarios have been applied to situate learners in various key roles of teacher educators. The teacher educators as students in the program admitted that the SBL approach was very interesting, motivating and challenging whereas lecturers felt that the SBL was an effective approach in facilitating students to engage in learning and assessment activities (Karunanayaka & Lekamge, 2005). The distance education material developed for this program was awarded the Commonwealth Excellence award in 2006.

Action research approach was another innovative mechanism applied by the Faculty of Education to empower the characteristics of Open and Distance

Learning. Several novel components unique to the faculty, namely Interactive Day Schools, Activity Based Assignment Day Schools (ABADs), OER-based e-learning courses, OER Integrated online environment, Innovative Education Practices, etc. have been incorporated through research with a view to improve the quality of teacher education programs. Further, through research-based evidence, the Faculty of Education was able to convince that the ODL teacher education programs are comparable with conventional programs in transferring skills required by the teachers in the school system (Tatto & Kularatne, 1993) and they are cost effective (Oliver, 1997) in nature. However, we have a long way to go to become a full-fledged ODL faculty which can provide open and flexible access to programs to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. To face the challenges in the future, the Faculty of Education should take necessary steps to increase confidence of its staff on Open and Distance Learning, expand and diversify its programs in line with the changing needs of its clientele, incorporate sophisticated technology to its programs and further strengthen the quality of its regional staff.

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G.D. Lekamge, PhD

*Emeritus Professor in Secondary & Tertiary Education
Former Dean/Faculty of Education, OUSL*



Commentary: Som Naidu

Teaching as Professional Practice

Teaching is not unlike medical practice, law, architecture, engineering, or social work for that matter, as a form of professional practice. Yet almost on all relevant criteria such as curriculum design, pay scales and professional accreditation, teaching rates poorly against all of these other professions. Universally teacher salaries are far lower than those of medical practitioners, engineers and lawyers, and the accreditation of teachers is far less stringently managed than those of these other professions. Entry marks into the profession of teaching is also universally lower than that for medicine, law, engineering, or architecture.

Why is this the case and why too little is being done about it? Why is entry criteria and their levels into teaching lower than that for any of these other comparable professions, when it is teachers who are responsible for educating the next generation of medical doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, and lawyers? Is it because the skills and subject matter competencies required for teaching are lower than that for medical doctors, lawyers, or architects? The answer to all these questions is a resounding no. Teaching is as complex and demanding a profession than that of law, engineering, architecture, or medicine.

What would it take for teaching to achieve “parity of esteem” with these other professions? The first is to see teaching as a form of professional practice comparable to the other professions. Steps in this direction must

begin with organizational structures within institutional settings which would see departments of teaching grouped with medicine, engineering, architecture, and law etc. This would ensure that teaching is seen as a form of professional practice comparable to other professions. Such an organizational structure would ensure that the content and structure of the curriculum of teachers benefits from the organization of those in the other professions, and vice versa, with similar requirements for both, work integrated and workplace-based learning and teaching. This would also include accreditation and reaccreditation of practitioners across the professions, including pay scales, in order for teaching to be able to attract the best and brightest to it, and no less than who seek to enter, engineering, architecture, medicine or law.

As demonstrated in this report, the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has led teacher education on several of these criteria—and for which they ought to be commended. Foremost, these comprise the adoption of an open and flexible approach to teacher education. This has comprised a significant innovation in the training of professionals at a time when the distance education mode itself struggled for parity of esteem with conventional education systems with a hostile professoriate and bureaucracy even if they saw obvious benefits in it for opening up access without loss of academic standards and rigor. A large part of this hostility was due to the challenges with both systems competing for limited resources and government funding. Distance education as the new kid on the block would have to fight for not only the same resources, but equal status. In Sri Lanka, OUSL was the flag bearer of that charge.

The adoption of technology, especially online learning technology, as these matured and became available was another significant achievement of the Faculty of Education at OUSL, as it was the first among all others to pioneer its adoption for teaching and supporting learning. At a time when many contested the separation of the teaching and learning acts in terms of its timing, place and pace, the introduction of technology was seen as a further death knell to the effectiveness and efficacy of the moderation of that learning and teaching transaction. Many argued that technology could not, and would not be able to replace the human factor. And many of them were quick to point out that even if technology were able to reproduce the role and functions of the human teacher, its adoption would only serve to produce more disadvantage as technology was not only unaffordable for many but very sparsely available.

A more significant innovation of the Faculty of Education at OUSL has been its adoption of a situated cognitive approach (a revolutionary approach at the time) to the design and development of their teacher education curricula. A noteworthy part of this innovation was that this was not a limited but a system wide effort where whole study programs have been developed with this approach. Notable among these is their Masters in Teacher Education program. The situated cognitive approach is widely adopted in other areas of professional practice in the training of medical practitioners, engineers, lawyers, and architects as it sees subject matter knowledge in the context of problems and situations that professionals encounter on a regular basis. The adoption of this approach to learning teaching avoids the detergence of subject matter knowledge from its context. In this manner professional practice is not judged by what professionals know but how to solve problems and situations that they will

encounter as part of their professional practice. The effort of the Faculty of Education at OUSL in this regard has been acknowledged, recognized, and commended, not just locally, or even regionally, but internationally.

A final point worth noting is that all of these innovations and initiatives, and their impacts for teachers, learners and institutions have been rigorously investigated and reported in multiple formats including conference papers, journal articles, edited books and websites. These initiatives underscore the importance of engaging with the scholarship of teaching as a form of professional practice. And the outputs of these efforts demonstrate that the engagement in the scholarship of teaching is not only a worthwhile critical reflective activity, but essential for its improvement as a field of professional practice. There are lessons to be learned in these initiatives for all other forms of professional practice!

Som Naidu, PhD, D.Litt., PFHEA.

Principal Associate (Technology, Education and Design Associates),

Executive Editor, Distance Education



Commentary: Jako Olivier

A Review of the Monograph

Teacher education is a key step in creating a foundation for successful education planning and implementation in any country. In this regard, open and distance learning (ODL) has opened access to teacher training and even further studies to individuals who in the past may not have had such opportunities. Consequently, it is useful to draw on the experiences of institutions that have successfully conducted teacher education through ODL.

In this publication, Commonwealth of Learning Chair, Professor Shironica P. Karunanayaka, meticulously unpacks the transformational journey of teacher education through ODL at The Open University of Sri Lanka. The publication serves as a unique and well-researched case from which other ODL, and hybrid-mode institutions can learn in terms of teacher training.

The monograph charts a detailed account of the establishment of the Faculty of Education. The carefully crafted account shows the progression of the faculty which mirrors international developments in teacher education and specifically also distance education. The details around pedagogical designs and approaches throughout the discussion of the faculty's development process are especially valuable. The publication also includes a very useful overview of technology integration initiatives in teacher education.

Some good practices from the Faculty of Education could be of use for similar faculties and departments in other contexts. In this regard, this faculty has successfully promoted ODL and supported innovative pedagogical approaches that incorporate learning-centered pedagogies. Employing novel technological developments and open educational resources towards enhancing and sharing content were also notable. A further significant element is learner support through contextualized support entities. On the side of staff, the importance of continuing professional development and research were also emphasized. Finally, having appropriate processes for quality assurance and management of challenges and promotion of resilience among both educators and learners are also commendable.

The monograph concludes with an overview of the key findings and some recommendations for the future. Building on strong foundations and through purposeful and good collaboration across different levels of the faculty sustained progress is evident. Importantly, the faculty has adjusted and critically engaged with global technological and pedagogical developments towards enriching ODL at this institution.

This study recommends that teacher education courses be based on strong theoretical foundation and are meaningfully designed. This implies a synergy between content, pedagogy, and technology especially in increasingly multimodal environments where appropriate technologies are employed. Emerging technologies should be integrated within contexts where appropriate blending of modes of learning are embraced. There is also a need for professional learning networks for practitioners as well as

support and promotion of action and design-based research. In terms of courses embracing open educational resources and open educational practices in teacher education would support a range of skills and a culture of openness and sharing of resources. In terms of programs, regular review and evaluation is necessary within a context of embracing the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

This publication not only provides a valuable overview of the exceptional and truly transformational journey of teacher education through ODL at OUSL, it also makes an important contribution to the scholarship of ODL in Sri Lanka and the wider higher education context. Furthermore, this monograph presents a good balance of both historical and general theoretical content that would be of value to many ODL institutions and practitioners. Finally, the recommendations presented here are highly relevant and applicable to the wider ODL discourse.

Jako Olivier, PhD


Adviser: Higher Education

Commonwealth of Learning

Annexure 1: Time Frame of the Overall Research Study (1 September 2023 – 30 April 2024)

Activity		Sept.'23	Oct.'23	Nov.'23	Dec.'23	Jan.'24	Feb.'24	Mar.'24	Apr.'24
1.	Designing and organizing the study tasks								
2.	Systematic search and review of documents								
3.	Conduct of semi-structured interviews								
4.	Analysis of documentary data								
5.	Analysis of interview data								
6.	Creation and updating of the website								
7.	Development of the monograph								
8.	Publishing the Monograph and the Website								
9.	Research Dissemination Seminar								
10.	Final Report Submission								

Annexure 2: Ethical Clearance from OUSL

<p>මගේ අංකය எனது இல My No. } ඔබේ අංකය உமது இல Your No. } දුරකථන தொலைபேசி Telephone } 011 2881000 Facsimile: 011 2906577 E-mail: dirresearch@ou.ac.lk</p>	 <p>ශ්‍රී ලංකා විවෘත විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය இலங்கை திறந்த பல்கலைக்கழகம் THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA</p> <p>Office of Director Research</p>	<p>දුරකථන 21, නාවල, නුගේගොඩ.</p> <p>අවු.සං. 21, 37604, නුගේගොඩ.</p> <p>P.O.Box 21, Nugegoda, Nugegoda.</p>
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29. 08. 2023

Prof. Shironica . P. Karunanayaka,
Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education,
Faculty of Education,
OUSL

Through: Dean/Faculty of Education, *forwarded* Hy-deris 2023/08/31

Dear Prof. Karunanayaka,

Dr. (Mrs) D. V. M. De Silva
Dean
Faculty of Education
The Open University of Sri Lanka
Nawala, Nugegoda


Ethical Clearance Approval

This refers to the Ethical Clearance Application you submitted to the Research Unit/OUSL. (Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL Research study planned as per the COL Chair MOU and Annual Plan – REF: MOU C23-284 signed between OUSL and Commonwealth of Learning in April 2023).

The Ethics Review Committee (ERC) members have evaluated your application. I wish to inform you that the Ethics Review Committee has given approval for your Ethical Clearance Application to conduct the research.

(Your application number – ER/2023/024)

Thank you,


Director - Research
Research Unit
The Open University of Sri Lanka
Nawala, Nugegoda.

Prof. S.R. Weerakoon
Director/Research
Chairperson/ER Committee

Annexure 3a: Letter for Informed Consent of Participants

Prof. Shironica P. Karunanayaka
Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education
Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka,
Nawala, Nugegoda.
15.09.2023

Dear Madam/Sir,

Requesting Your Participation in a Research Study: “Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL” (An activity planned in relation with the COL Chair MOU signed between OUSL and Commonwealth of Learning in April 2023, and as per the Annual Plan)

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), as the premier Open and Distance Learning (ODL) university in Sri Lanka, makes a significant contribution to the higher education system in Sri Lanka. Through its unique ODL approach, OUSL offers open and flexible access to higher education and continuing professional development opportunities for diverse groups of learners, especially to working adults, in various fields of study. Since its inception in 1980, OUSL has offered teacher education programmes to fulfil the essential need of professional development of teachers and educators.

As COL Chair at OUSL (Area: Teacher Education), appointed in April 2023, I have undertaken to conduct a research study titled “Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL”, focusing on the historical development of teacher education at OUSL through the generations of ODL, with a view to identify the transformational changes that had occurred during 1980-2023. The study will mainly adopt the documentary research methodology, supported with semi-structured interviews conducted with selected participants. Key outputs of the study will be a research monograph and a weblog as an open access e-resource compiling categorized artefacts. It is envisaged that a systematic review and analysis of the significant changes that had occurred over four decades in teacher education via ODL at OUSL, especially in terms of pedagogical advancements and technological integrations, would provide useful insights for productive enhancements in the future teacher professional development programmes and initiatives in OUSL as well as in Sri Lanka.

As a former/current academic staff member of OUSL, who has been/is involved in the teacher education programmes conducted by OUSL during 1980-2023, I would like to kindly request your consent to be a participant of this research study. Your support is expected by participating in a semi-structured interview of a duration about 30 minutes. It is assured that all data will be used only for research purposes, and that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.

If you are willing to be a participant in this research study, could you please fill in and sign in the Consent Form attached herewith, and return it to me at your earliest convenience via email.

Your support in this regard would be highly appreciated!
Yours sincerely,
Shironica P. Karunanayaka

Annexure 3b: Form for Informed Consent

Research Study: "Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL"

Consent form – Interview Participants

- I have read and understood the information sheet about the research study titled "**Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL**".
- I understand that taking part in this study involves participating in a semi-structured interview with the principal investigator of the research study.
- I voluntarily consent to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with, and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without needing to explain why.
- I agree to the interview being audio recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that any personal information that can identify me - such as my name or where I live or work - will not be shared beyond the research study team.
- I understand that anonymized quotations from my data may be used in the outputs of this project (for examples, discussions, presentations, or reports).
- I understand that I can contact the researcher at any time and ask to see the data they have collected from me.
- I understand that the data collected in this study will be kept securely and that it will be destroyed after three years.

If you agree with all the statements above, please insert your name and signature below and return this form to the principal investigator.

Name of the participant:

Signature:

Date:

Thank you very much!

Annexure 4: Interview Schedule

Research Study: “Teacher Education via ODL at OUSL”

(An activity planned in relation with the COL Chair MOU signed between OUSL and Commonwealth of Learning in April 2023, and as per the Annual Plan)

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

1. Could you please tell me about your involvement in teacher education at OUSL?
(E.g., Since when, for how long, in what capacity, main responsibilities, key subjects/areas, etc.)
2. What are your views about conducting teacher education programmes via Open and Distance learning (ODL)?
E.g., key features, strengths, limitations, advantages, challenges, etc.)
3. How do you see the development of teacher education via ODL at OUSL since 1980 to 2023? Please give some significant examples.
4. Do you think the pedagogical approaches adopted in the teacher education programmes of OUSL have changed over time? If so, in what ways? Please give some examples.
5. How would you explain the impact/s of technology on teacher education programmes of OUSL over the years? Please give some examples.
6. What are the key trends that you have observed in teacher education via ODL at OUSL? Please give some examples.
7. Based on your experience as a teacher educator at OUSL, what are the most significant good practices that should be continued, and any areas that need improvements for future developments? Please give some examples.
8. Would you like to share any other thoughts/views?

Annexure 5: Key administrative officers of the Education Unit, the Departments, and the Faculty of Education (1981-2023)

Period	Position	Name
1981-1985	Head/Education Unit	Prof. Elsie Kotalawela
1985-1987	Head/Education Unit	Dr. Rupa Wijeratne
1987-1992	Head/Dept. of Education	Prof. Elsie Kotalawela
1992-1993	Head/Dept. of Education	Dr. Rupa Wijeratne
1993-1995	Head/Dept. of Education	Prof. Chandra Gunawardena
1995-1999	Head/Dept. of Education	Dr. Rupa Wijeratne
1999-2000	Head/Dept. of Education	Dr. A.G.H. Ismail
2000-2003	Head/Dept. of Education	Dr. Vinithamali Wickramaratne
1999-2003	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood Education	Dr. Wimala Palihakkara
2003-2006	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. Chandra Gunawardena
2006-2012	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. G. Dayalatha Lekamge
2012-2015	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. Shironica P. Karunanayaka
2015-2018	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. P.C.P. Jaufar
2018-2021	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. Shironica P. Karunanayaka
2021-2023	Dean/Faculty of Education	Prof. Sashikala Kugamoorthy
2023-todate	Dean/Faculty of Education	Dr. Vajira de Silva
2003-2006	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Dr. G. Dayalatha Lekamge
2006-2012	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Dr. Shironica P. Karunanayaka
2012-2015	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Mr. L. Ranjan Gonsalkorale
2015-2018	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Dr. Sashikala Kugamoorthy
2018-2024	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Prof. W.M.S. Wanasinghe

2024-todate	Head/Dept. of Secondary & Tertiary Education	Prof. F.M. Nawastheen
2004-2005	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Dr. Rukmani Premaratne
2005-2008	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Dr. Indrani Talagala
2008-2012	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Dr. Srini de Zoysa
2012-2015	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Dr. Anoma Ariyaratne
2015-2021	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Dr. Malini Munasinghe
2021-2024	Head/Dept. of Early Childhood & Primary Education	Prof. T. Mukunthan
2004-2006	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Mr. K.A.D.C. Oliver
2006-2011	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Dr. P.C.P. Jaufar
2011-2013	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Mr. T. Thanaraj
2013-2016	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Dr. T.D.T.L. Dhanapala
2016-2019	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Dr. K. Anoma C. Alwis
2019-2021	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Prof. Sashikala Kugamoorthy
2021-2023	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Dr. K.D.R.L.J. Perera
2023-todate	Head/Dept. of Special Needs Education	Dr. Samantha N. Jayasinghe
2020-2023	Head/Dept. of Educational Management & Leadership	Mrs. C. Hewapathirana
2023-todate	Head/Dept. of Educational Management & Leadership	Mr. W.M.S. Weerakoon

S. P. Karunanayaka

Annexure 6: Study programs offered by the Education Unit and Departments of the Faculty of Education (1981-2023)

Period	Program Name
1980-to date	Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)
1980-to date	Certificate in Preschool Education (CPE)
1990-todate (Phased-out) Since 2020	Master of Education (MEd) [with Research] RESTRUCTURED/RENAMED as Master of Arts in Education (MAEd)
2020-todate	Master of Education (MEd) [Course Work]
1992-to date	Bachelor of Education Honors in Natural Sciences (BEdNS)
1995-to date	Advanced Certificate in Preschool Education (ACPE)
1999-2018 (Phased-out)	Master of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE)
2005-2020 Since 2020	Master of Arts in Teacher Education (Int) (MATE-I) RESTRUCTURED/RENAMED as Master of Teacher Education (MTE)
2007-todate	Diploma in Early Childhood and Primary Education (DECPE)
2008-todate	Post Graduate Diploma in Special Needs Education (PGDSNE)
2009-2012 (Phased-out)	Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE)
2012-todate	Bachelor of Education Honors in Drama & Theatre (BEdDT)
2012-todate	Bachelor of Education Honors in Special Needs Education (BEdSNE)
2019-todate	Bachelor of Education Honors in Primary Education (BEdPE)
2020 - onwards	Master of Education in Special Needs Education (MEdSNE)
2023 (Approved)	Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (PGDELM)
Proposed - In Development	Bachelor of Education Honors in Learning Design and Technology (BEdLDT)
Proposed - In Development	Master of Learning Design and Technology (MLDT)



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